RURAL DEPOPULATION

IN LITTLE BOW AND OTHER AREAS OF ALBERTA'S SOUTH

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RURAL DEPOPULATION STUDY:

LITTLE BOW AND OTHER AREAS OF ALBERTA'S SOUTH

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RURAL DEPOPULATION STUDY

I. INTRODUCTION

Alberta's rural south has been in the bad news again. We hear these bleak words used to describe the situation: drought, insects, record heat, depopulation.

The last time we heard these words used in Alberta was during the "Dirty '30's", and the period before the '30's, during the deep droughts of the years immediately after World War I and into the mid '20's.

Now the same region is mentioned, with the same words, with many of the same circumstances behind those words.

This study does not deal with the causes and depth of the drought, the heat, the infestation, the low commodity prices, or the debt.

Rather, we are concerned with the immediate effects of these circumstances on the people who live on the land, on the farms, and in the small communities which dot the area.

Our study will focus on the area included in the provincial political division of Little Bow as a representative slice of life in Alberta's rural south in 1988.

We will see, through the use of various statistical measures available to us, how the people of Little Bow have responded to the troubles. After we have examined the numbers, we will reflect upon the need for government policy to deal with the circumstances that our facts reveal, in a manner yet unmatched in the history of Government in the province of Alberta.

This is not a survey of attitudes. We have sought to uncover how the ills of Alberta's rural south — and much of the agricultural community in Alberta and Western Canada — are changing the nature of the "human landscape" in Little Bow. We have not sought to ask people, for example, whether they will leave if the drought continues or what they think of the government's response to the circumstances. Instead, we have sought to uncover, for example, whether and to what extent the people have actually left. What the people of Little Bow think of their circumstances is one thing; their response to their circumstances is another, and our concern. How the decisions of all these individuals add up is the object of our study.

We should reveal our biases at the outset. We feel, and our study reflects the view, that Alberta needs more people living in its rural areas, not less. This counts for the dryland of Alberta's rural south, as well for the relatively more prosperous farming areas of Central and Northern Alberta.

II. THE FACTUAL OVERVIEW

A. Overview of the Constituency of Little Bow

This overview on rural depopulation is included to provide the reader with general information about the Little Bow Constituency. The areas briefly highlighted are the following: general background, administrative jurisdictions, and political jurisdictions.

General Background

The Little Bow Constituency covers an area of Southern Alberta that is entirely rural. Within the constituency are eighteen communities and their surrounding areas. Of the eighteen communities, only three are designated as towns by Alberta Municipal Affairs. They are Vauxhall, Vulcan and Gleichen.

The provincial electoral divisions were revised for the 1986 election and the Little Bow Constituency increased in area and population. The communities of Cluny and Gleichen were taken in, as well as the entire Blackfoot Reserve. In population figures, the constituency grew by an estimated seven thousand people.

After the 1986 revision of the provincial electoral districts, the census figures for 1981 were revised to include the new areas. This material is referred to as *1981.

Administrative Jurisdiction

Within the boundaries of the Little Bow Constituency are parts of three irrigation districts. They are: District 7 — Lethbridge Northern, District 11 — Bow River, and District 12 — Western. The County of Vulcan and part of the County of Wheatland are located inside the constituency as well. Also included in the constituency boundaries are portions of three municipal districts. They are: the M.D. of Taber, the M.D. of Foothills, and the M.D. of Willow Creek. For the federal census figures the Little Bow Constituency falls into census divisions two, five and six.

Political Jurisdiction

Federally, the Little Bow area has been represented by three men: Mr. Gordon Taylor, MP Bow River; Mr. Blaine Thacker, MP Lethbridge-Foothills; and Mr. Bob Porter, MP Medicine Hat. After the 1988 federal election, the Little Bow area will be represented by the Members of Parliament for Lethbridge, MacLeod and Medicine Hat. Provincially, the constituency has been represented by Mr. Raymond A. Speaker for the last twenty five years.

B. *The People of Little Bow at Work*

Through analysis of the Labour Force statistics, we are able to better develop an image of the residents of Little Bow. Further, we believe that these statistics are representative of rural, southern Alberta in general. The Labour Force data allows us to see what the residents of the Little Bow area do with their working time, and the data gives us an idea of the economic activity found there.

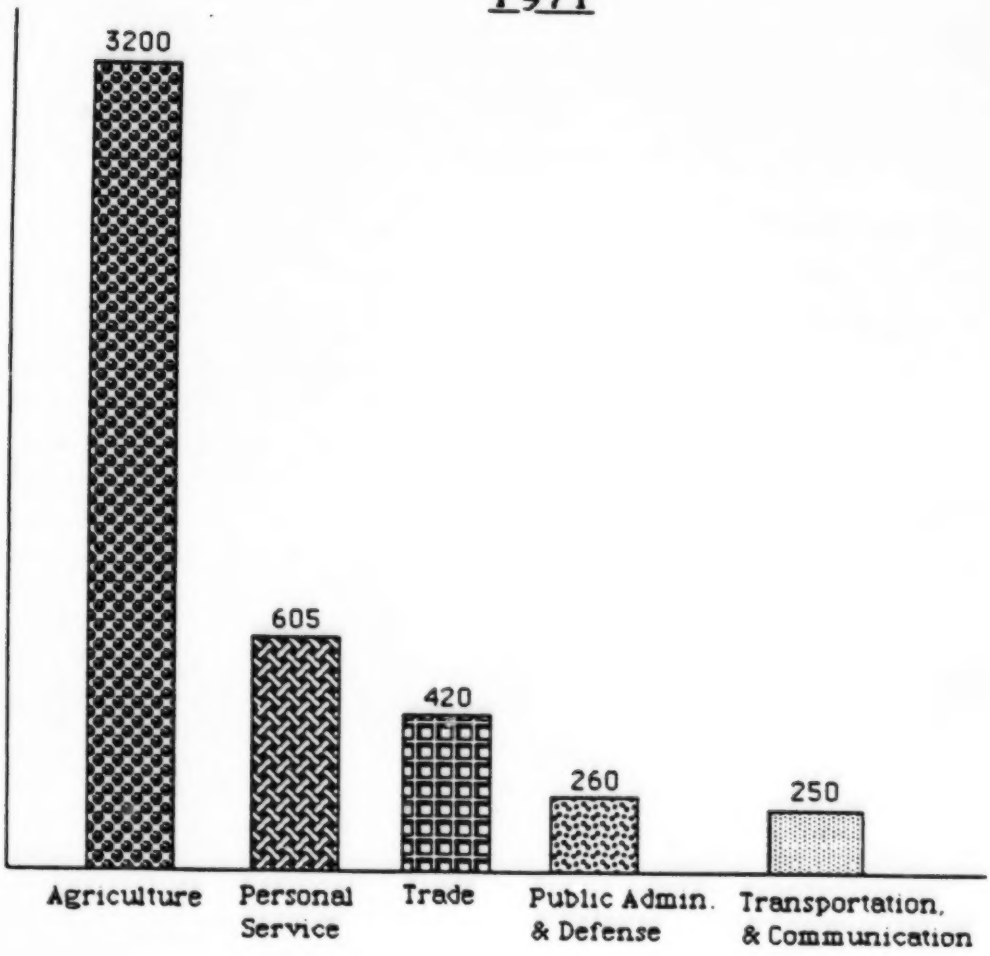
We have chosen two measures to assess the nature of employment and economic activity in Little Bow. One approach is illustrated by the Labour Force by Industry data. The Alberta Bureau of Statistics defines Labour Force by Industry as "the number of people employed or seeking work, in that specific industry". The second approach is through occupational diversity. This is illustrated by the Labour Force by Occupation data. The Alberta Bureau of Statistics defines Labour Force by Occupation as "the number of people employed or seeking work in that specific occupation".

As expected, Figures 1-5 show that the agricultural industry dominates as a source of employment and economic activity. The figures also show a decrease in the proportion of the working population involved in agriculture. Unfortunately, 1986 figures are not yet available, so it is not yet possible to see whether this trend has continued.

Main Economic Activity

Figure 1

Labour Force By Industry
1971



	Males	Females	Total
Agriculture	2575	625	3200
Personal Service	155	450	605
Trade	295	125	420
Public Admin. & Defense	190	70	260
Transportation& Communication	210	40	250

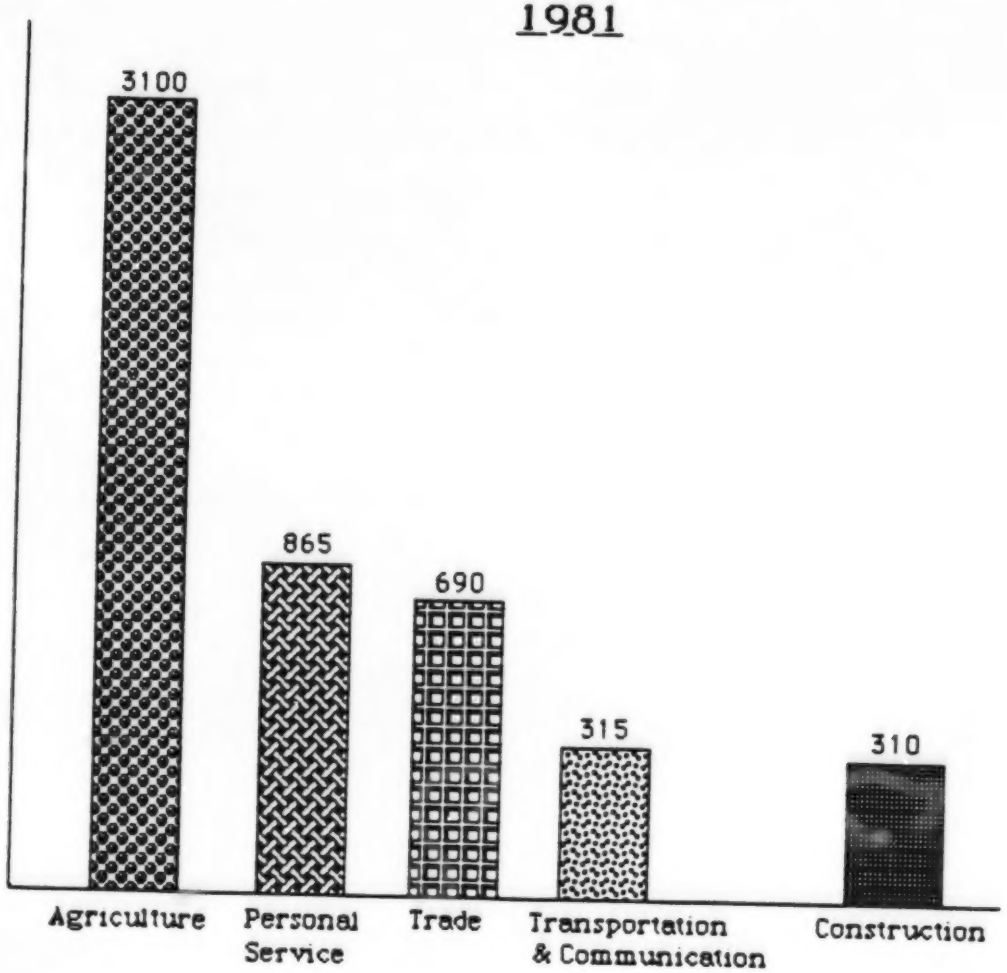
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Main Economic Activity

Figure 2

Labour Force By Industry

1981



	Males	Females	Total
Agriculture	2510	590	3100
Personal Service	300	565	865
Trade	400	290	690
Transportation& Communication	255	60	315
Construction	270	40	310

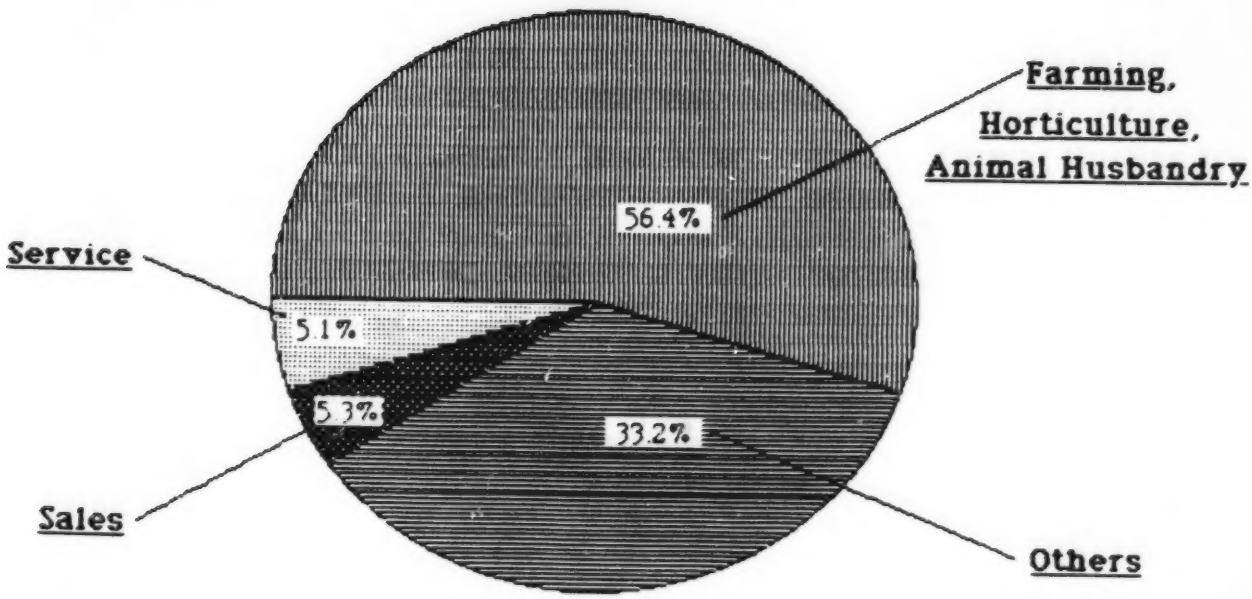
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 3

Occupational Diversity

Labour Force By Occupation

1971



	Males	Females	Total
Farming, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry	2565	595	3160
Sales	205	90	295
Service	120	165	285

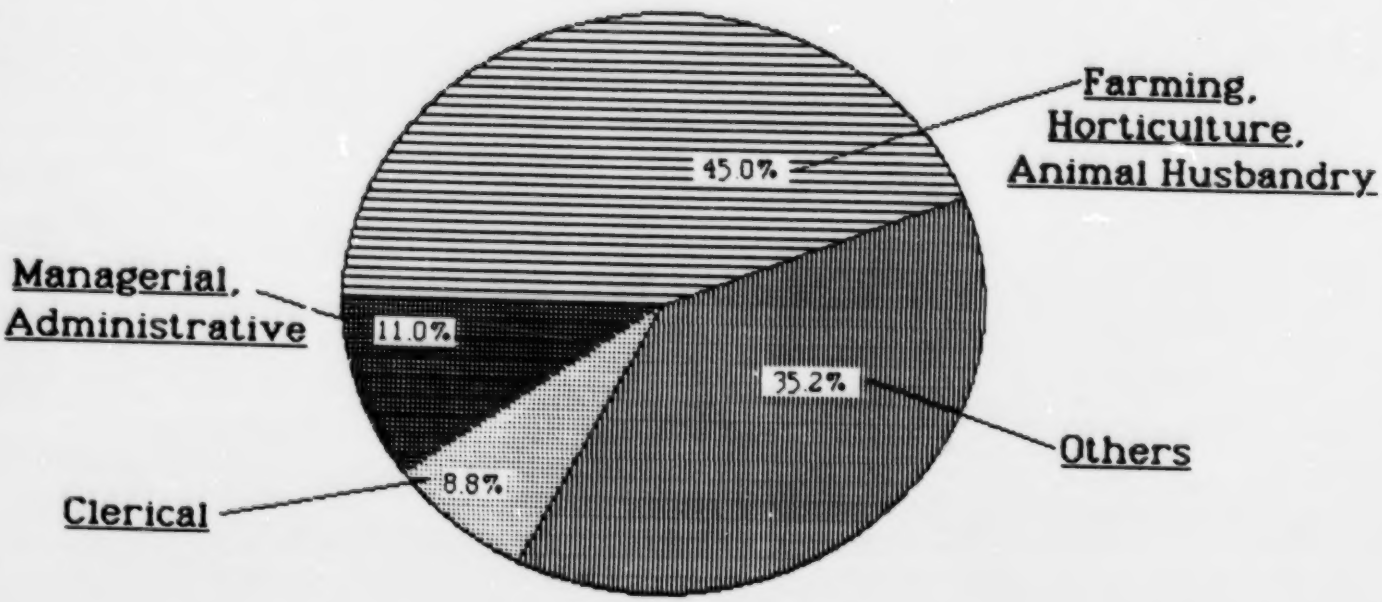
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 4

Occupational Diversity

Labour Force By Occupation

1981



	Males	Females	Total
Farming, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry	2275	450	2725
Managerial, Administrative	495	170	665
Clerical	85	450	535

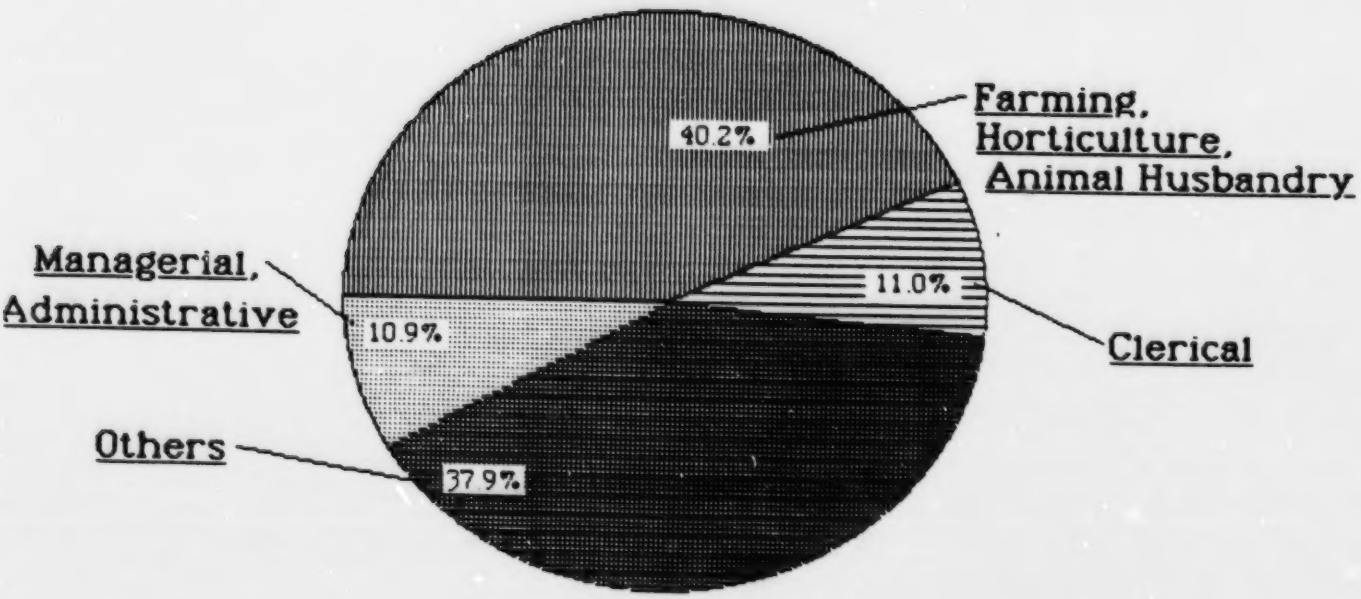
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 5

Occupational Diversity

Labour Force By Occupation

*1981



	Males	Females	Total
Farming, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry	3075	615	3690
Clerical	155	855	1010
Managerial, Adminstrative	735	260	995

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

C. Ethnic Make-up

We feel that the ethnic make-up of the people of the Little Bow Constituency is relevant to population trends in the constituency. The included measures of ethnic make-up give a good picture of the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the population within the constituency.

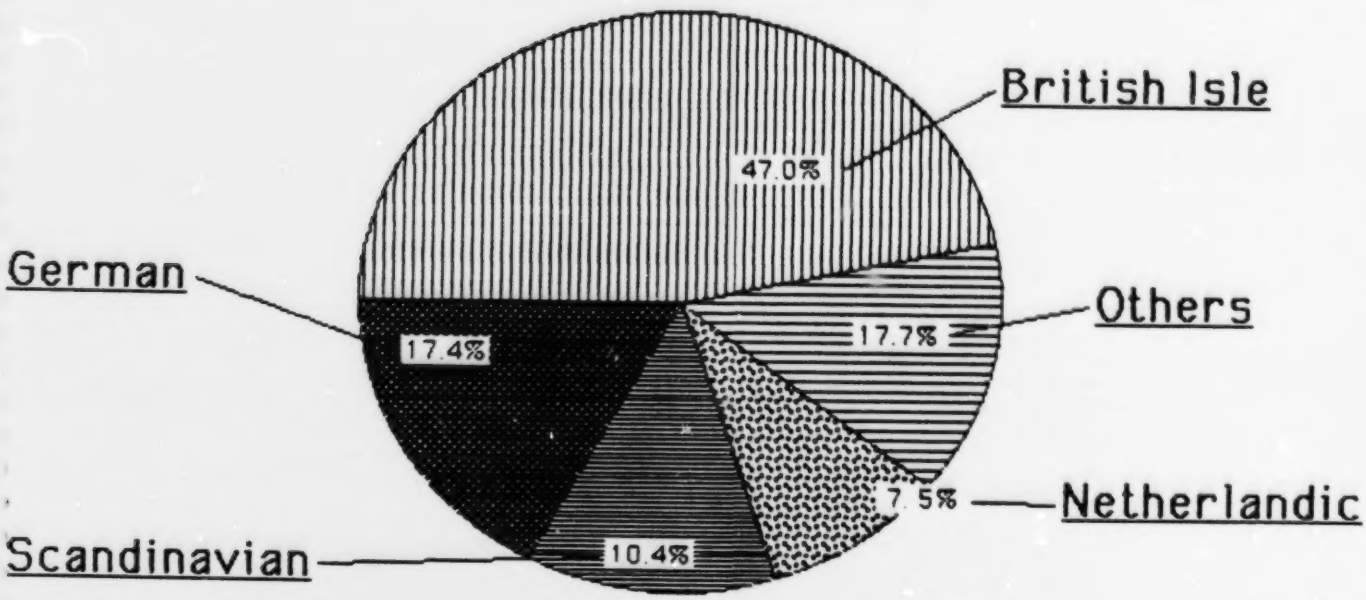
Ethnic make-up can be evaluated two ways through the census material. The first is data from the mother-tongue category. The Alberta Bureau of Statistics defines mother-tongue as "the first language learned in childhood and still understood at the time of the census". The second measure is through the data of ethnic origin. Ethnic origin is defined by the Alberta Bureau of Statistics as, "the ethnic or cultural group that your ancestors belonged to".

Figures 6-11 show that the population of Little Bow is of largely north and west European origin. English is the mother-tongue of the majority, and increasingly so. Note also the increase of aboriginal tongues with the enlarged constituency area in 1981.

Figure 6

Ethnic Make-Up

Ethnic Origin
1971



	Total
British Isle	6155
German	2280
Scandinavian	1355
Netherlandic	975
Census Total	13080

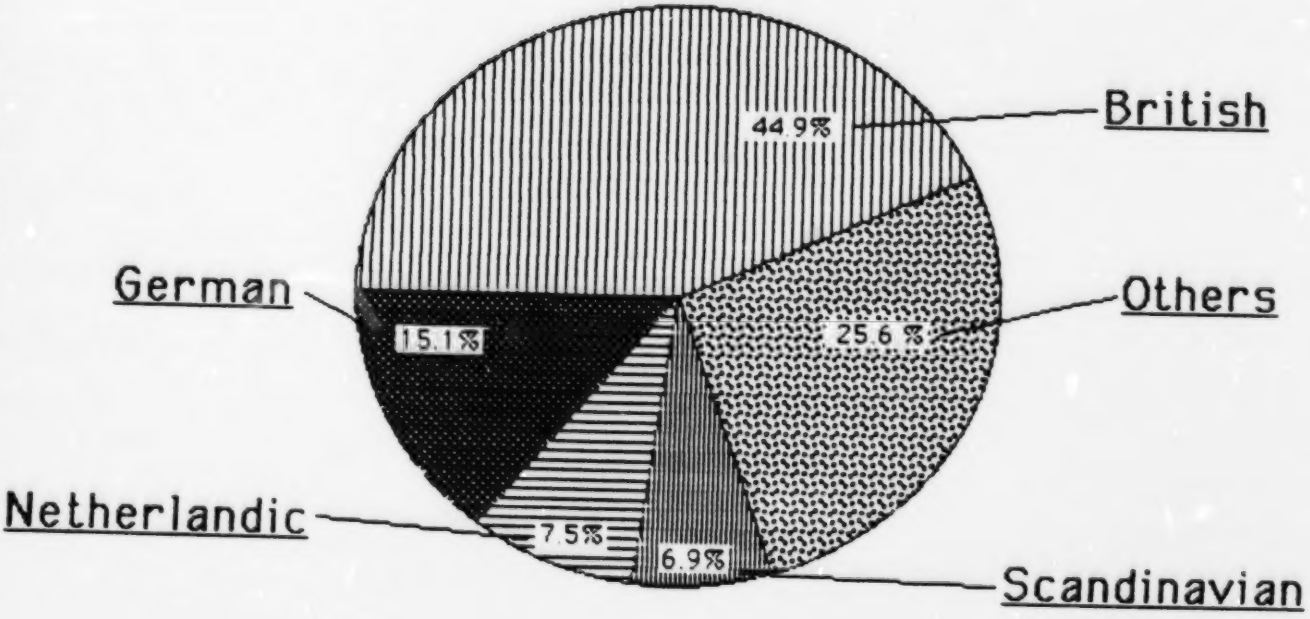
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 7

Ethnic Make-Up

Ethnic Origin

1981



	Total
British	5765
German	1935
Netherlandic	965
Scandinavian	885
Census Total	12825

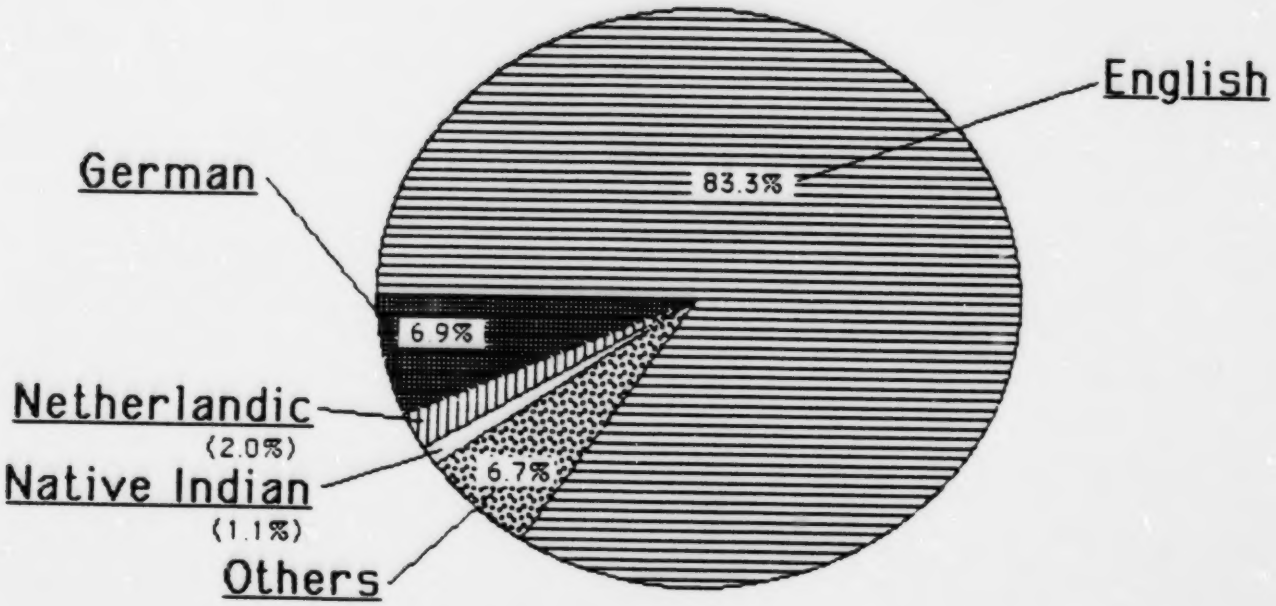
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 8

Ethnic Make-Up

Mother-Tongue

1976



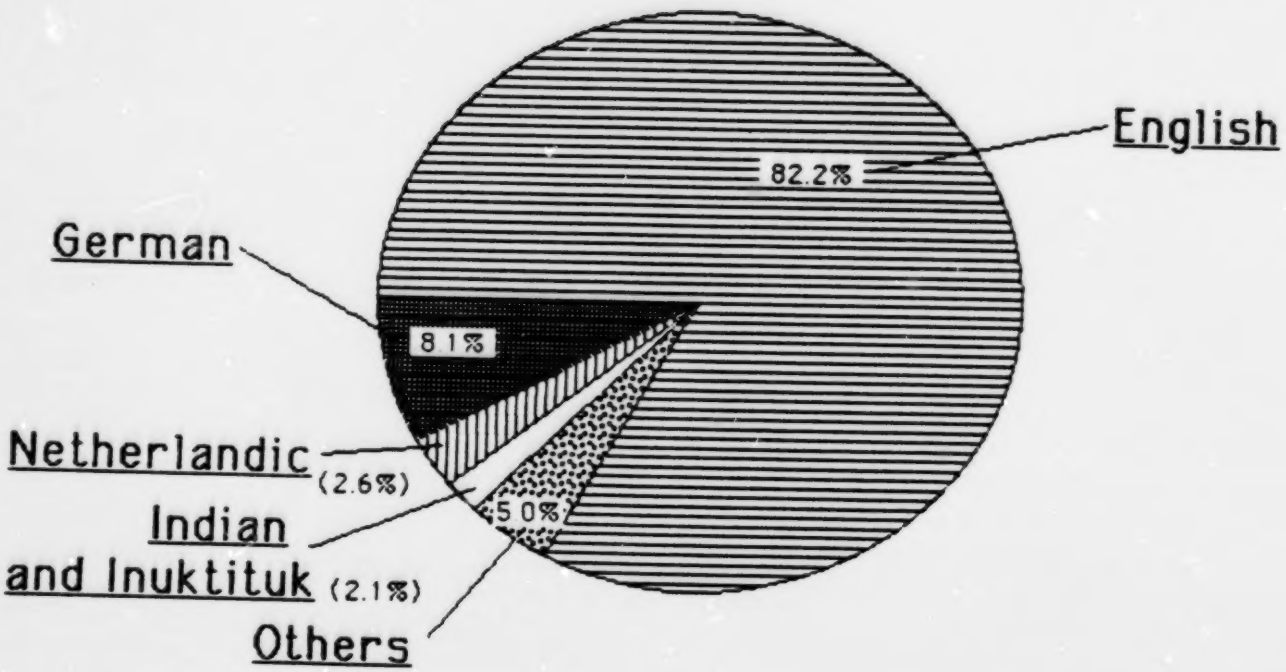
	Total
English	10795
German	900
Netherlandic	255
Native Indian	140
Census Total	12955

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 9

Ethnic Make-Up

Mother-Tongue
1981



	Total
English	10760
German	1060
Netherlandic	335
Indian and Inuktituk	275
Census Total	13085

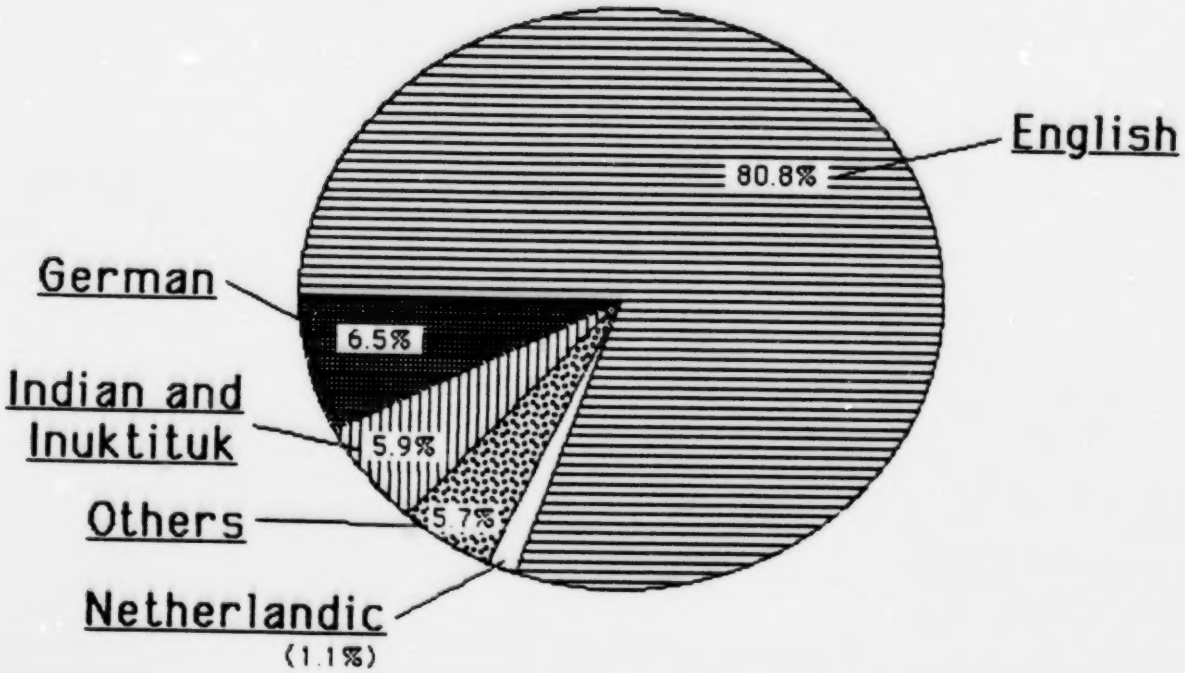
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 10

Ethnic Make-Up

Mother-Tongue

* 1981



	Total
English	16075
German	1300
Indian and Inuktituk	1180
Netherlandic	385
Census Total	19900

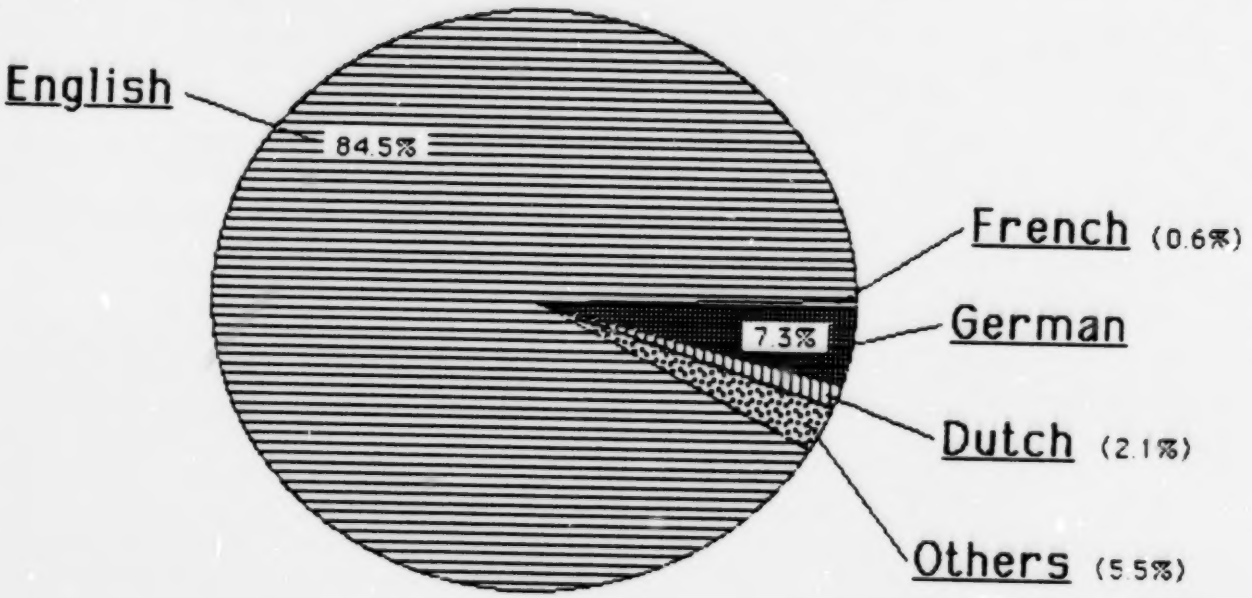
Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 11

Ethnic Make-Up

Mother-Tongue

1986



	Total
English	15070
German	1310
Dutch	380
French	110
Census Total	17840

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

D. Age Structure

"Age Structure" is our measure of the age of the people of Little Bow over time. With this data we can determine whether the population is aging or not. Clearly, this is an important question for the future of the region.

"Age Structure" is composed of two measures. We will first look at the total numbers in each age group over time (Figure 12A), which shows us increases and decreases in numbers. Further, to fully analyze the aging of the population over time, we use percentages (Figure 12B). This allows us to see fluctuations within the age structure category over time.

*The figures show an absolute decline in all age categories to thirty five years since *1981. This age group also declined somewhat as a percentage of the total population since 1981.*

*Also, the total population of the constituency has fallen by 8.3% since *1981.*

Figure 12A

LITTLE BOW

Age Group Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	1,155	1,135	1,235	1,835	1,610
5-14	3,045	2,580	2,345	3,815	3,235
15-24	2,315	2,490	2,330	3,525	3,055
25-34	1,410	1,675	1,905	3,060	2,830
35-44	1,440	1,340	1,465	2,380	2,440
45-54	1,465	1,380	1,330	1,980	1,825
55-64	1,185	1,205	1,225	1,705	1,630
65 +	965	1,050	1,260	1,655	1,670
Total	**12,980**	**12,855**	**13,095**	**19,955**	**18,290**

Figure 12B

Age Group Percent of Total Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	8.9%	8.8%	9.5%	9.2%	8.8%
5-14	23.5%	20.1%	17.9%	19.1%	17.7%
15-24	17.8%	19.4%	17.8%	17.7%	16.7%
25-34	10.9%	13.0%	14.6%	15.4%	15.5%
35-44	11.0%	10.4%	11.2%	11.9%	13.3%
45-54	11.3%	10.7%	10.2%	9.9%	10.0%
55-64	9.1%	9.4%	9.3%	8.5%	8.9%
65 +	7.4%	8.2%	9.6%	8.4%	9.2%

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

E. Age Structure of Farmers

Owing to the rural nature of the Little Bow Constituency and its emphasis on agriculture, we must consider the age structure of farmers. Through the same analysis used for the general population, we seek trends in the age of the population. This information will help us determine whether the farming industry is aging and will require young and dynamic input.

The numbers used were obtained from the federal census divisions two, five and six. Although these divisions take in much more area than the Little Bow Constituency, the data should represent Little Bow and rural, southern Alberta in general.

Unfortunately, Figures 13 and 14 were prepared without data for 1986, which data is not yet available as of the date of this writing. Thus, we are unable to determine whether the numbers of "young farmers" (34 and younger) have declined since 1981.

Figure 13

Number Of Farmers Per Age Group For Census Division 2, 5, 6

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981
25	327	442	430	341
25-34	1,751	1,884	2,000	2,056
35-44	2,756	2,455	2,606	2,573
45-54	3,377	2,934	2,867	2,540
55-59	1,374	1,280	1,246	1,364
60-64	1,056	966	1,044	1,066
55-69	698	594	607	782
70 +	532	460	517	727
Total Population	**11,871**	**11,015**	**11,317**	**11,449**

Figure 14

Percent of Total Farmers Per Age Group For Census Division 2, 5, 6

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981
25	2.7%	4.1%	3.8%	3.0%
25-34	14.8%	17.1%	17.7%	18.0%
35-44	23.2%	22.3%	23.0%	22.5%
45-54	28.4%	26.6%	25.3%	22.2%
55-59	11.6%	11.6%	11.0%	11.9%
60-64	8.9%	8.7%	9.2%	9.3%
65-69	5.9%	5.4%	5.4%	6.8%
70 +	4.5%	4.2%	4.6%	6.3%

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

F. Community Populations

The populations of the communities within the Little Bow Constituency represent a central concern of our study. These figures show whether the people of Little Bow are choosing to stay or leave the area. In other words, is depopulation occurring? In Figures 15 - 25 we have charted the population of all the towns and villages in the constituency.

We have graphed these figures because numbers themselves are often hard to visualize. We have decided to chart the populations from 1966 to 1987, to show the patterns over time. The community population figures should be used to compliment the other areas studied in this paper.

The following information was obtained directly from the community offices. The totals for 1986 and 1987 were then checked against the findings of Alberta Municipal Affairs (Municipal Councellor, Vol. 32, No. 6, 1987). If a discrepancy was found, the community office figure was used.

General Observations (Population)

Charted in Figures 15 - 25 are the three towns (Gleichen, Vauxhall and Vulcan) and the eight villages (Arrowwood, Barons, Blackie, Carmangay, Champion, Cluny, Lomond and Milo) found in the Little Bow Constituency. We tried to chart their population patterns from 1966, however, this was not possible for all the communities.

The town of Gleichen has shown a decline of 2.9% since 1976. But more importantly, after a five year period of stability the town's population lost fifty four people from 1986 to 1987. This is a 14.2% drop.

The town of Vauxhall has shown an increase of 6.1% since 1966. However, after a four year period of stability the population decreased by eighty five people. This is a 7.9% drop.

The town of Vulcan has shown a decrease of 5.6% since 1966. Of greater importance is the decrease in population of eighty seven people between 1986 and 1987. This is a 5.8% drop, and also occurred after a four year period of stability.

From 1986 to 1987, these three towns showed an average decline in population of 9.3%. According to the Alberta Municipal Affairs findings the average population change experienced by towns in Alberta was a decrease of 0.6%. This is an important difference to note, as the towns of Alberta contained 13% of the province's total population in 1987.

The villages of Arrowwood and Milo both showed increases of 1.7% from 1982 to 1987. These increases are insignificant, as two births per town account for the increase.

The village of Barons has shown an increase of 8.9% from 1966 to 1986. After a three year period of stability, the village population declined by forty people between 1986 and 1987. This is a 12% decline.

The village of Blackie has shown an increase in population of 70.5% from 1966 to 1986. After a five year period of stability, the village population decreased by seventy seven people between 1986 and 1987. This is a 22.4% decline.

The village of Carmangay has shown an increase in population of 4.9% since 1966 to present. After a decline of twenty five people from 1985 to 1986, the village showed an increase of eleven people from 1986 to 1987. This is the equivalent of a 4.5% increase.

The village of Champion has shown an increase of one person from between 1982 and 1987. The population peaked at 380 people for four years. After the period of stability the population declined by twenty two people from 1986 to 1987. This is a 5.8% decline.

The village of Cluny saw a five year period of stability since 1982. Between 1986 and 1987, the population declined by twenty two people. This is a 14.4% decline.

The village of Lomond has shown a decrease in population of 17.7% since 1966 to present. After a five year period of stability, the village population decreased by twenty seven people between 1986 and 1987. This is the equivalent of a 13.2% decline.

From 1986 to 1987, these eight villages showed an average decline in population of 8.3%. According to the Alberta Municipal Affairs findings, the average population change experienced by villages in Alberta was a decrease of 4.5%. The villages of Alberta contained 2% of the province's total population in 1987.

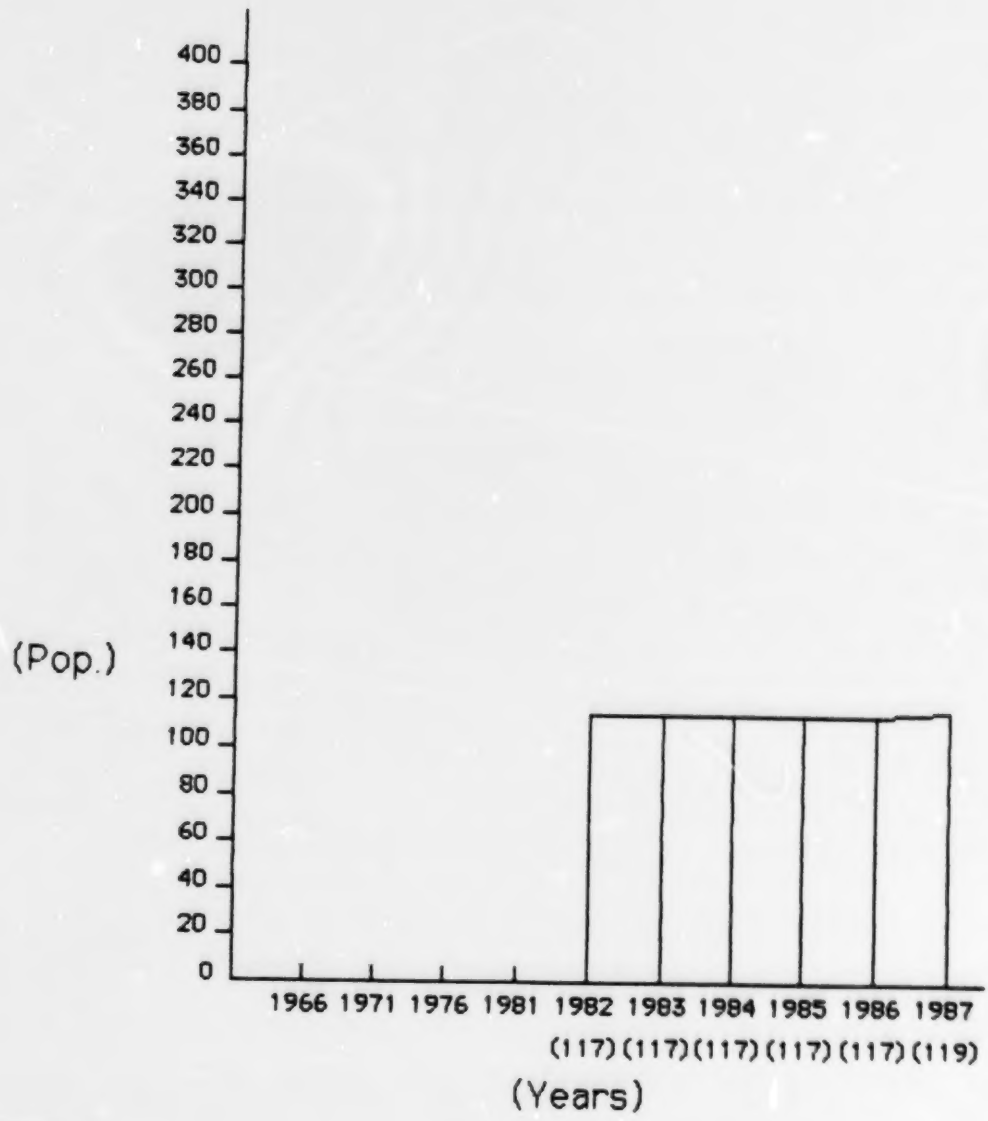
Finally, we decided to chart the growth of the five largest communities in the constituency as of 1987. They are Blackie, Champion, Gleichen, Vauxhall and Vulcan. The chart, Figure 26, displays the population pattern from 1966 to 1987. These communities combined, grew by 3.8% in this time period. However, between 1986 and 1987, the communities decreased in population by 7.9%.

From 1966 to 1987, the population of Alberta, Figure 27, grew by 62.7%. The only time the province experienced any decline was between 1983 and 1984. The Little Bow Constituency however, experienced two declines in total population between 1971 and 1986.

In general, the data shows that the rural, Little Bow Constituency has not shared in the absolute population growth of the province. The five largest communities have experienced an absolute decline in population since 1985. Also, the total population of the constituency has declined since 1981, as indicated by Figure 12A and the accompanying text.

Figure 15

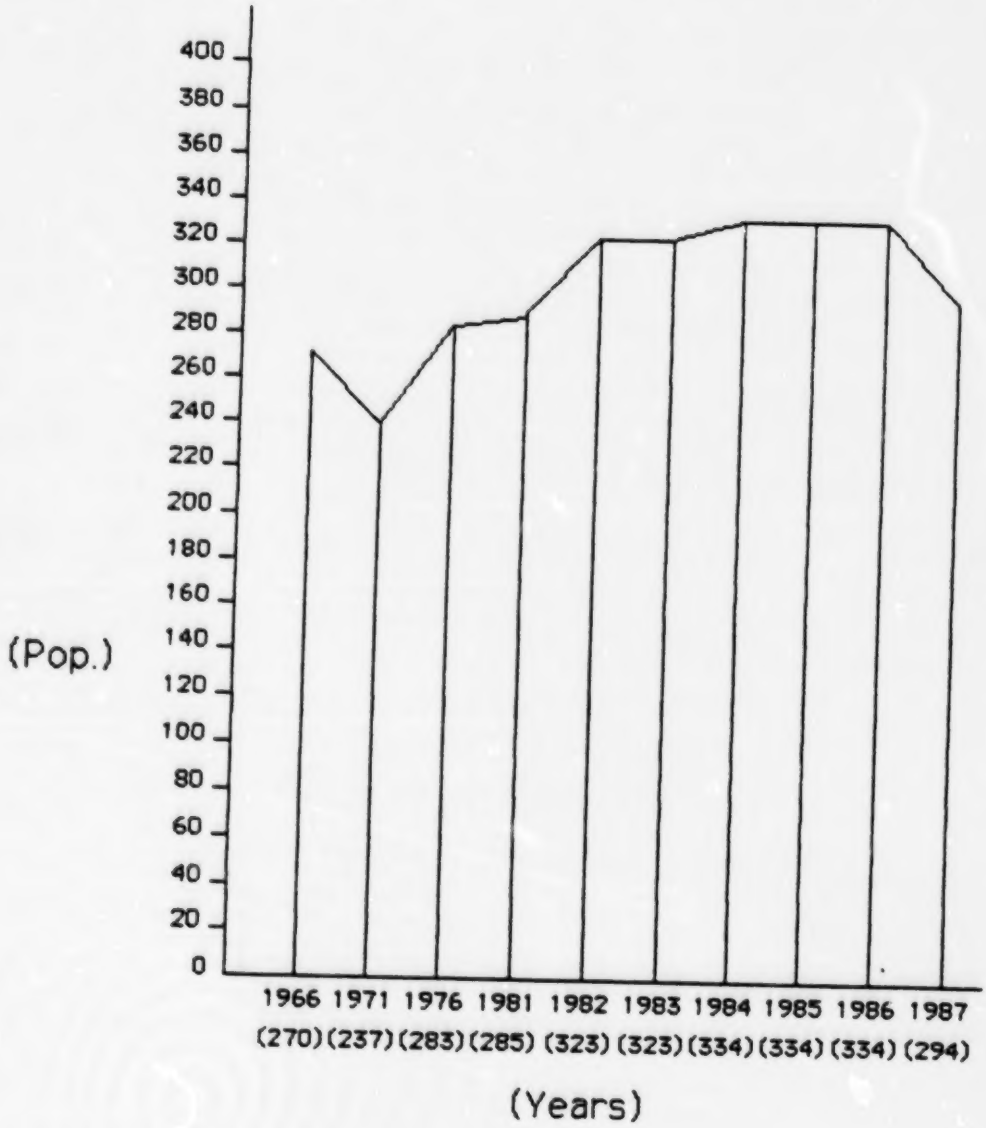
Historical Population Pattern For Arrowwood



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Community Office

Historical Population Pattern For Barons

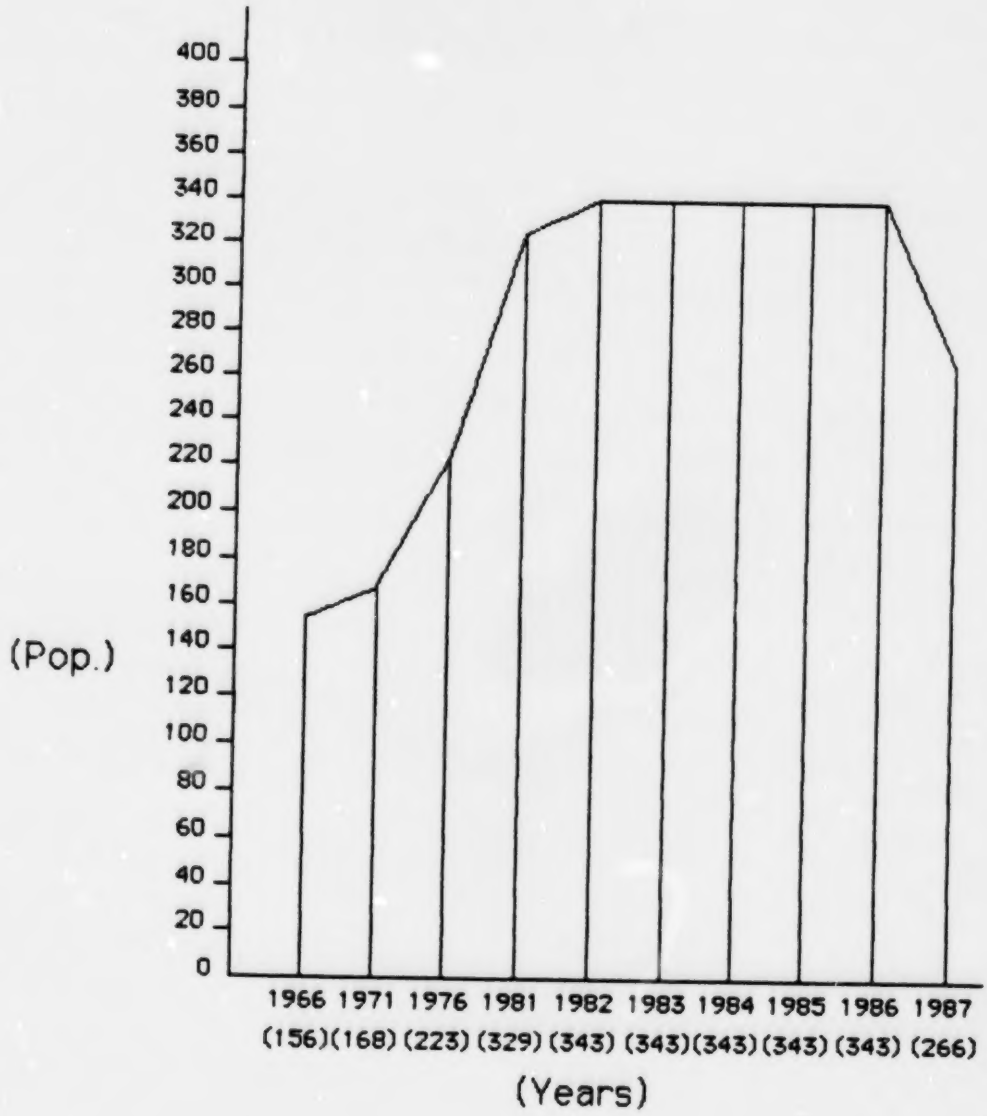
Figure 16



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Figure 17

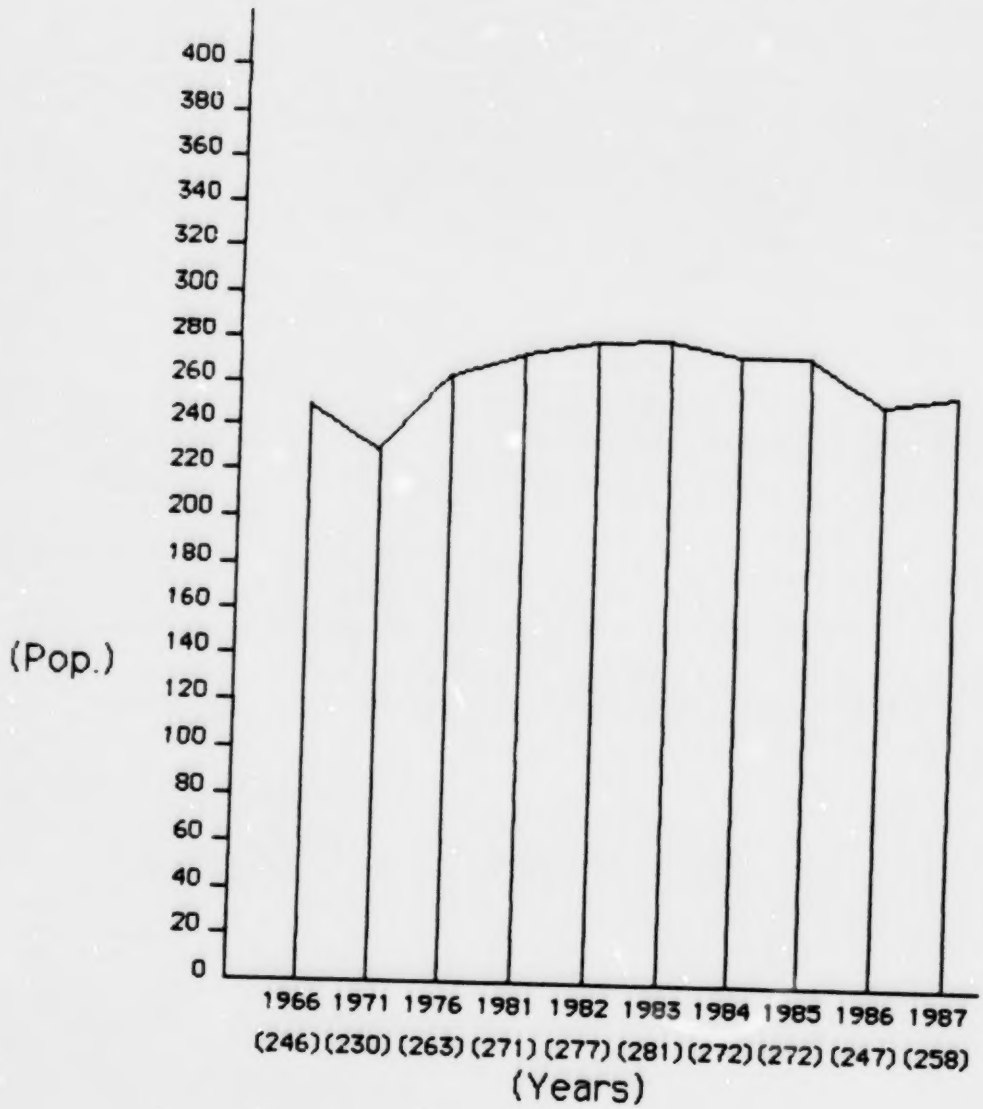
Historical Population Pattern For Blackie



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Historical Population Pattern For Carmangay

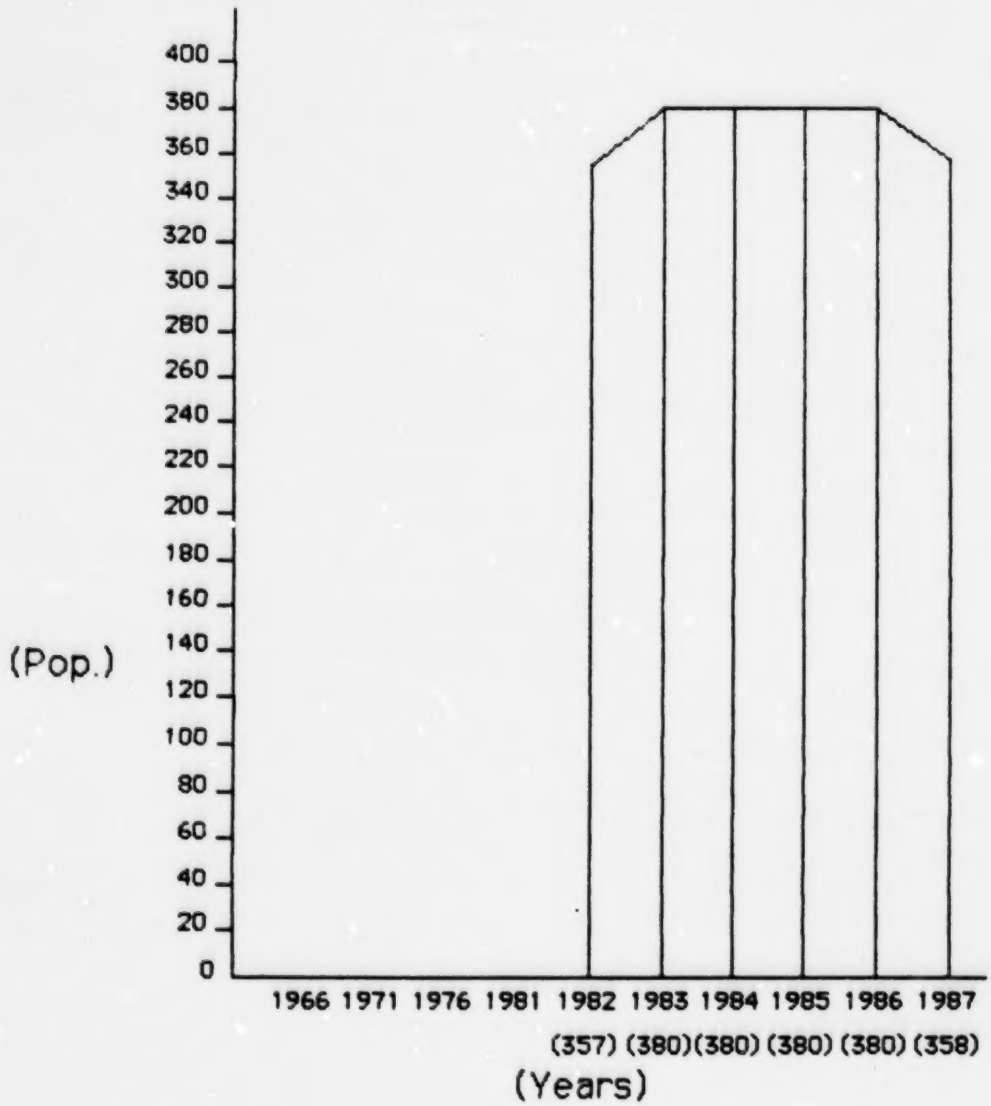
Figure 18



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Figure 19

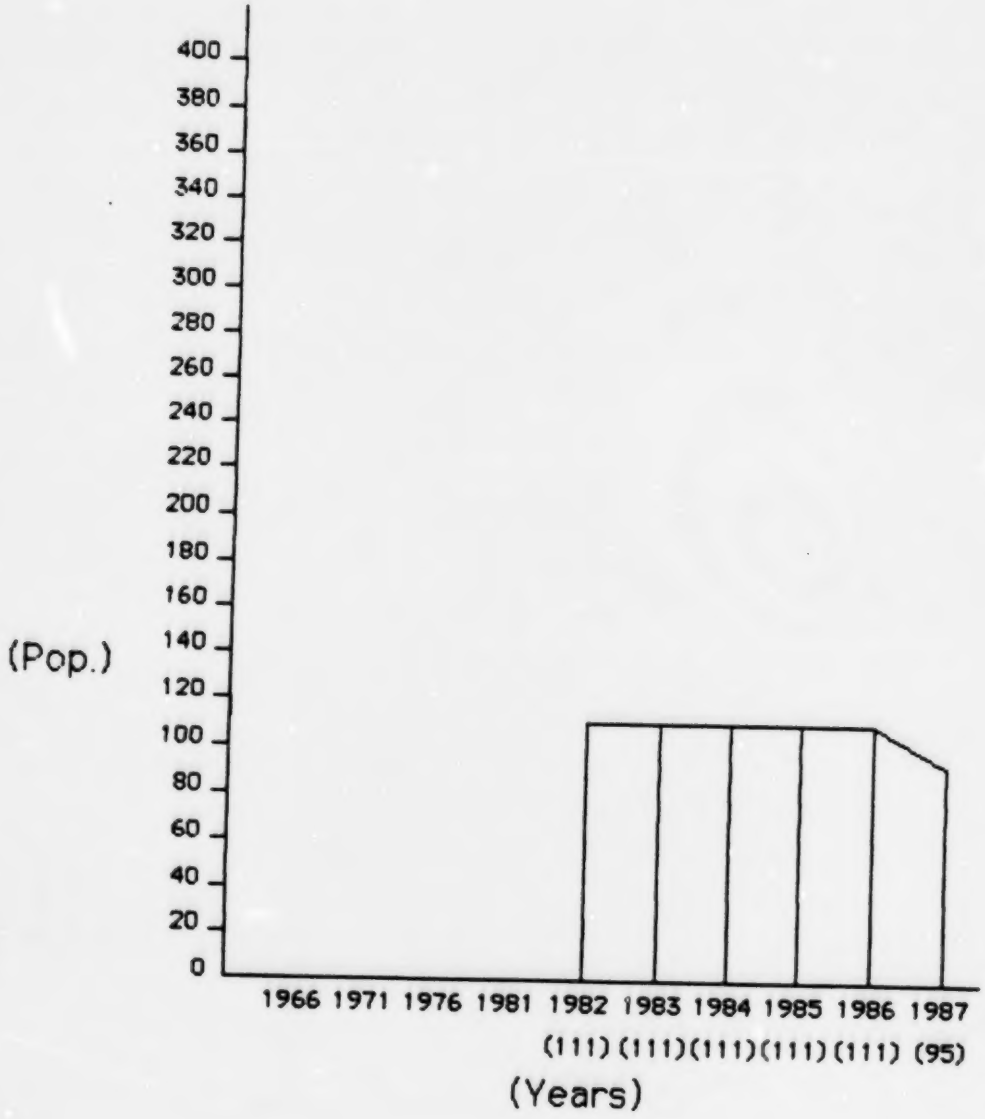
Historical Population Pattern For Champion



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Community Office

Historical Population Pattern For Cluny

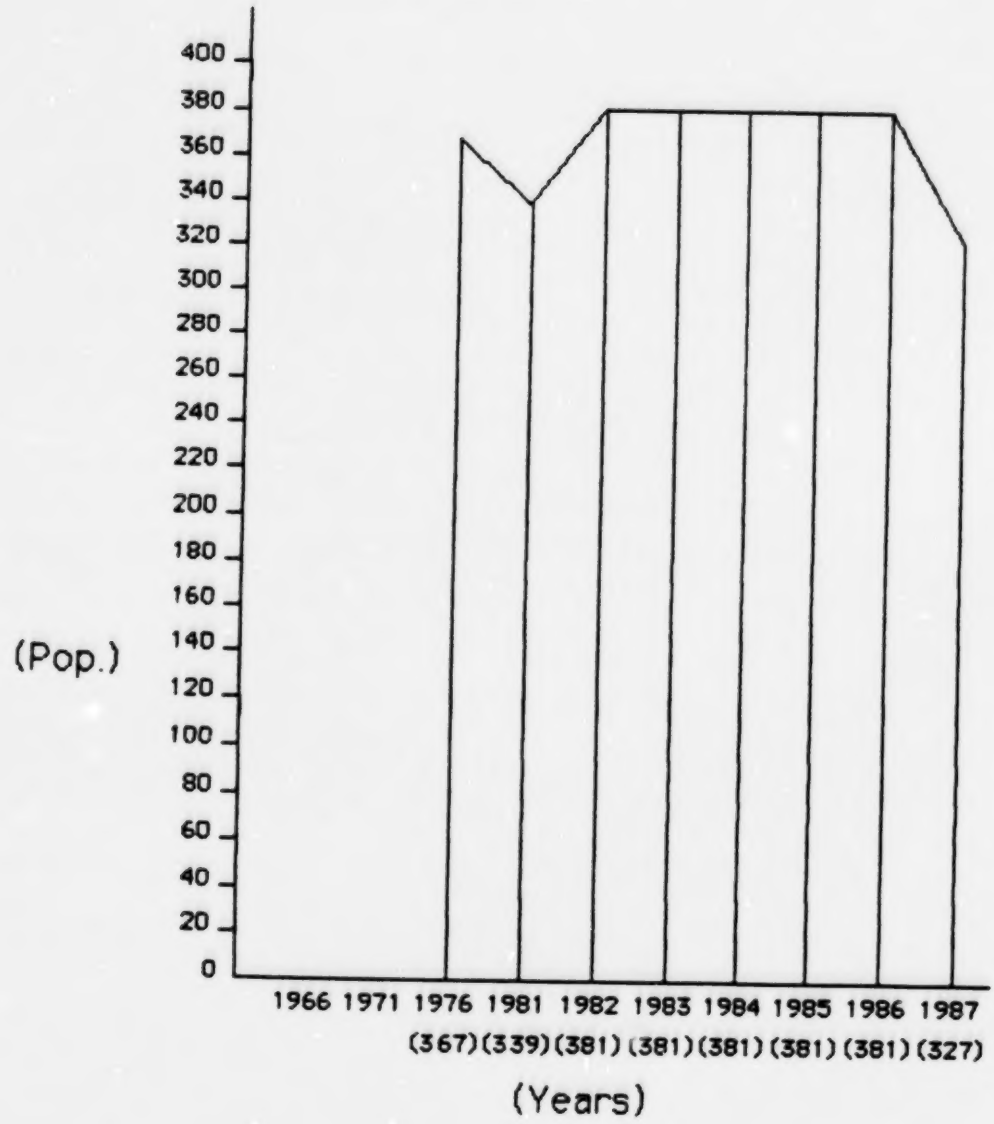
Figure 20



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Community Office

Historical Population Pattern For Gleichen

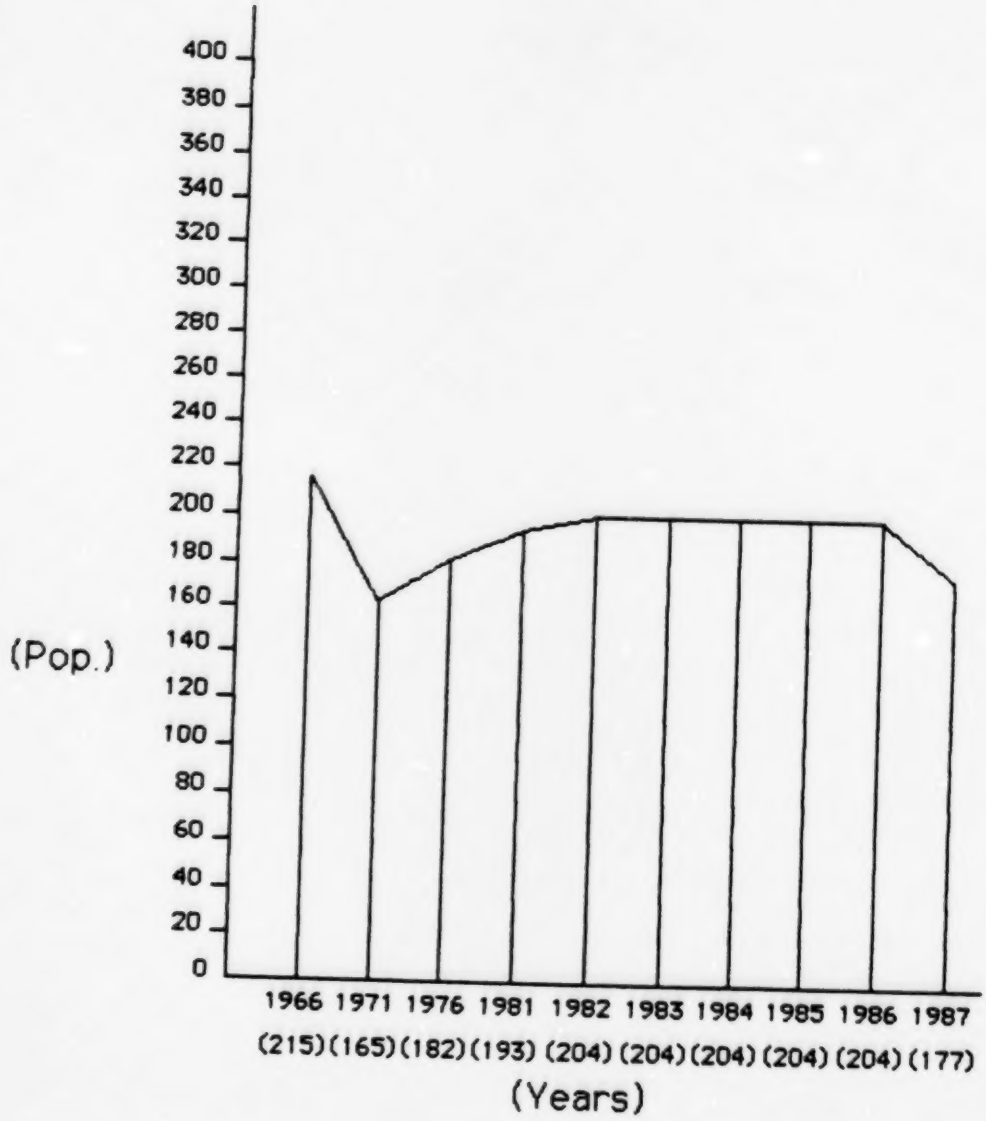
Figure 21



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Historical Population Pattern For Lomond

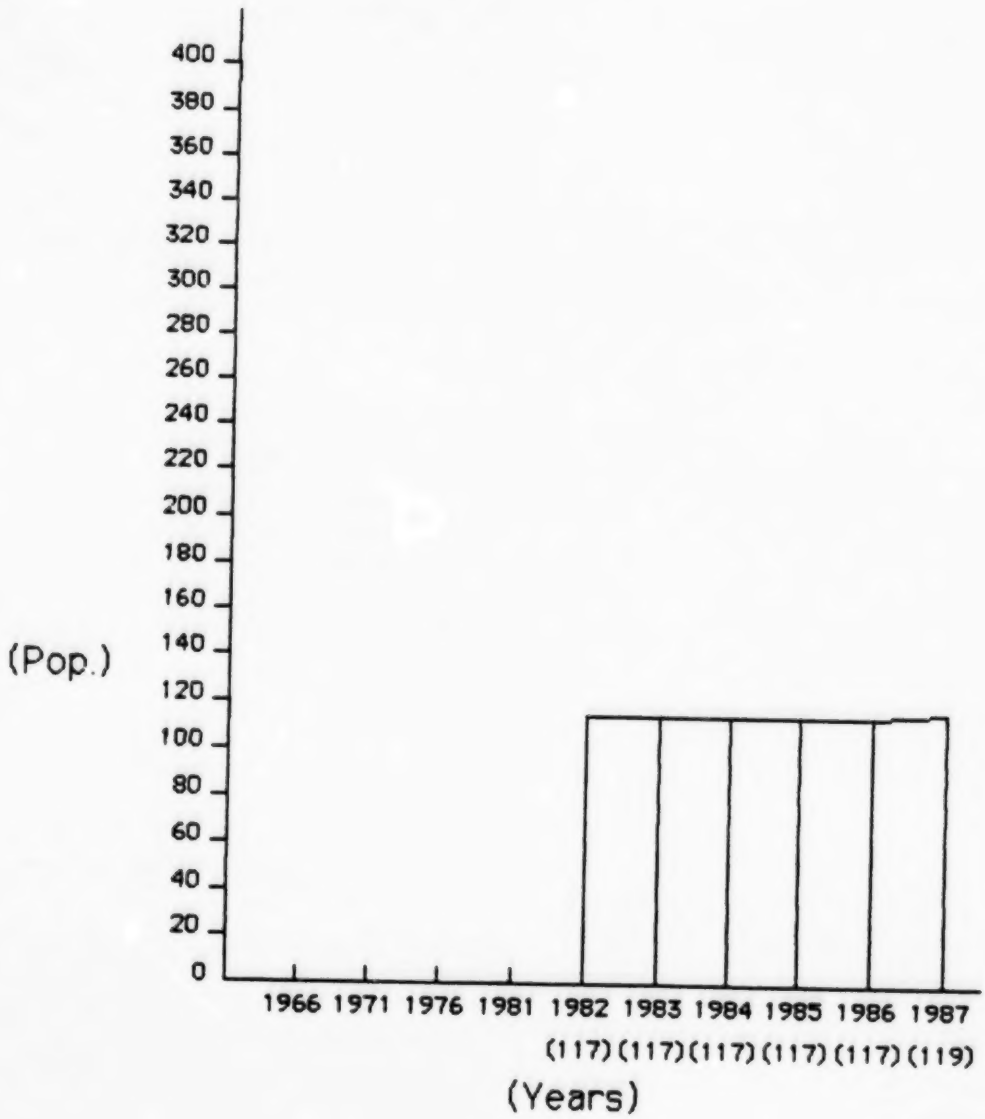
Figure 22



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Figure 23

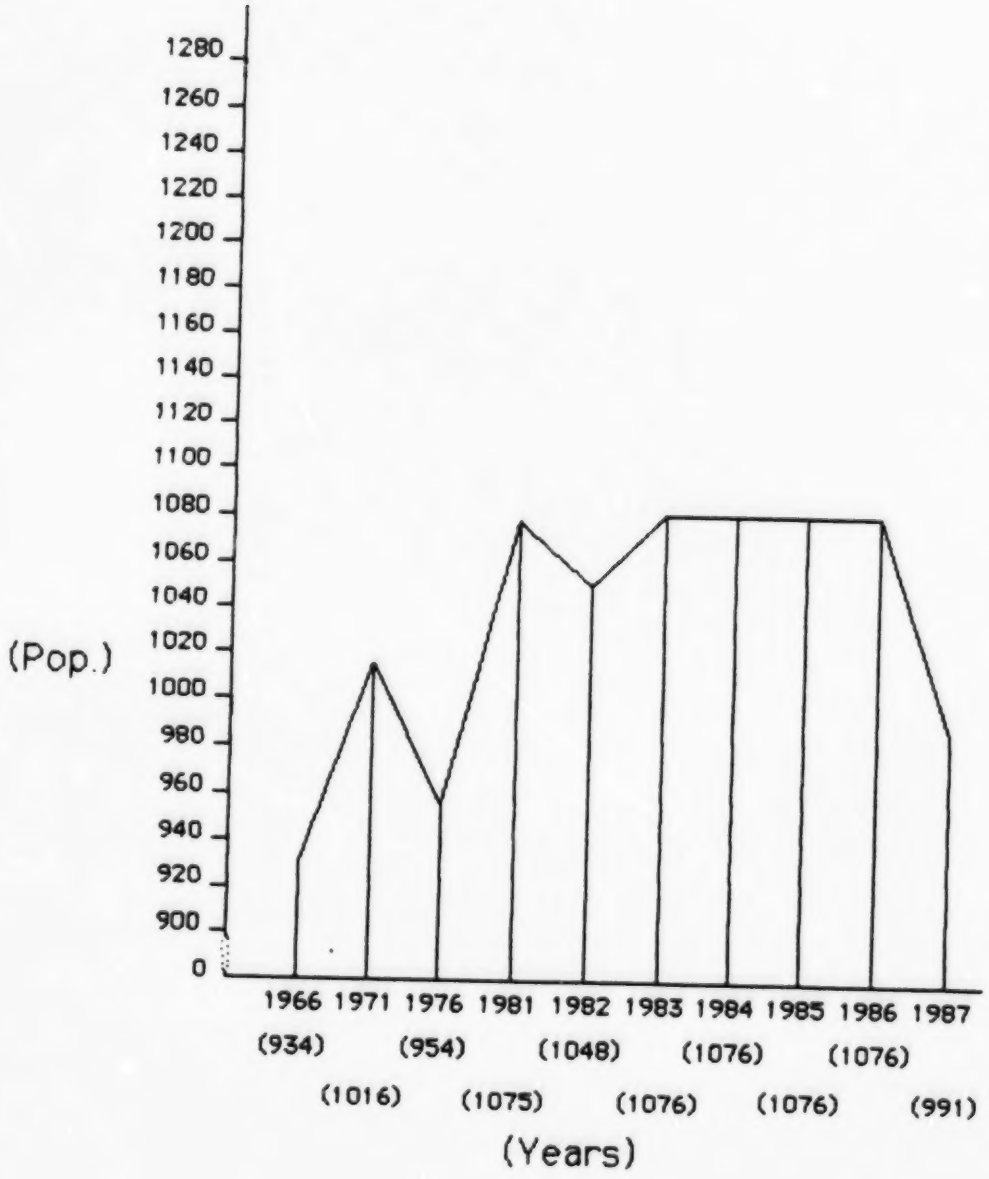
Historical Population Pattern For Milo



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Community Office

Historical Population Pattern For Vauxhall

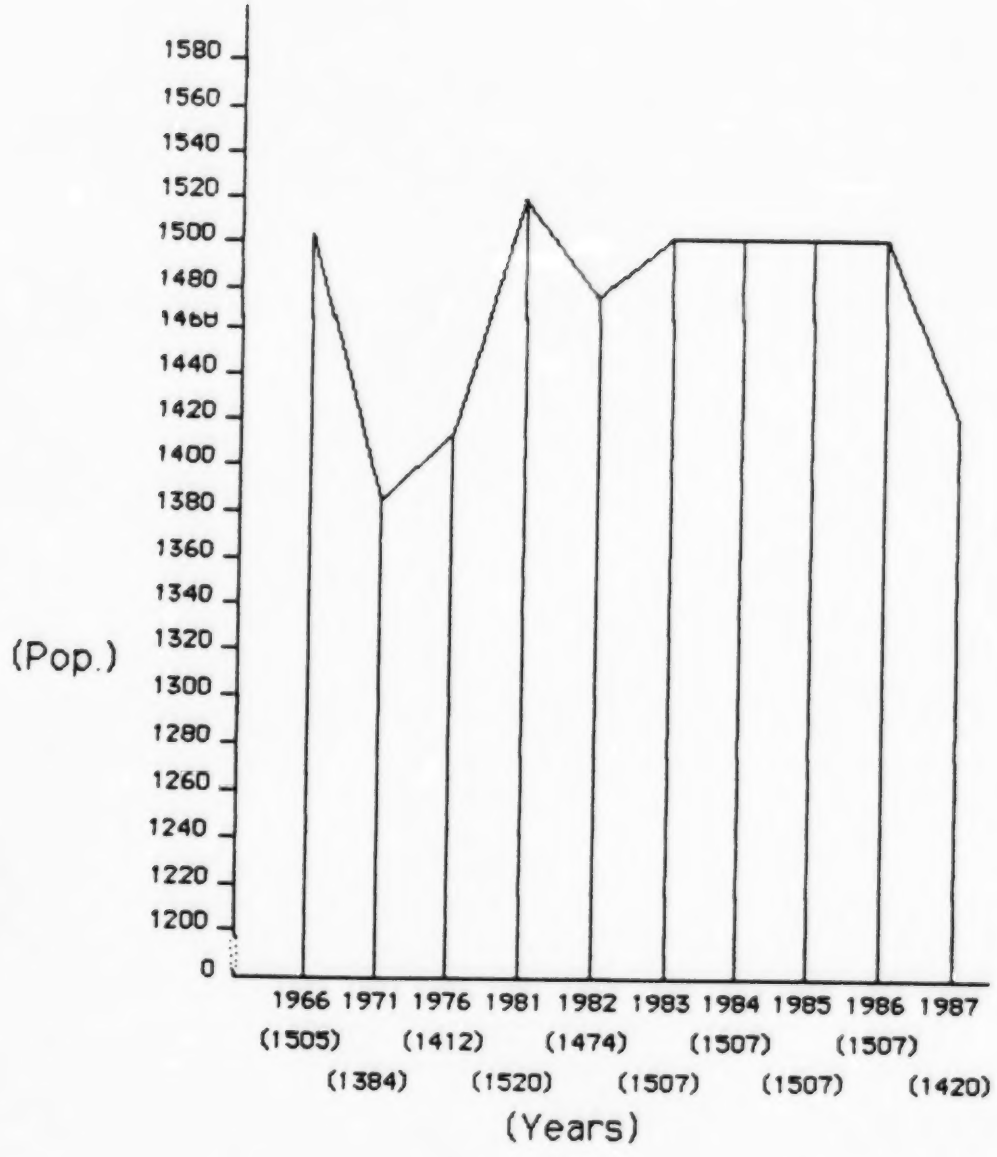
Figure 24



Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Historical Population Pattern For Vulcan

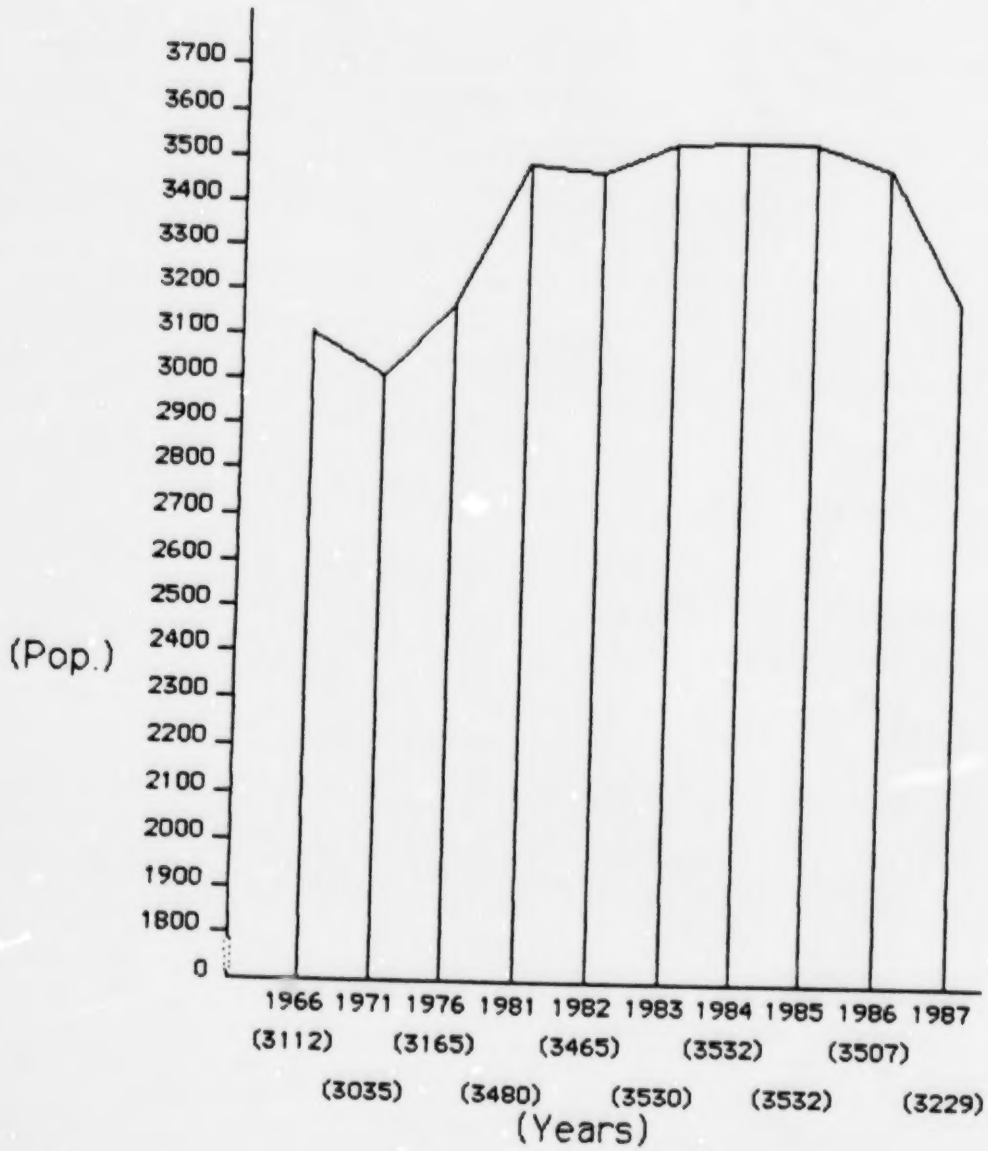
Figure 25



Source. Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Historical Population Pattern For Five Largest Communities

Figure 26

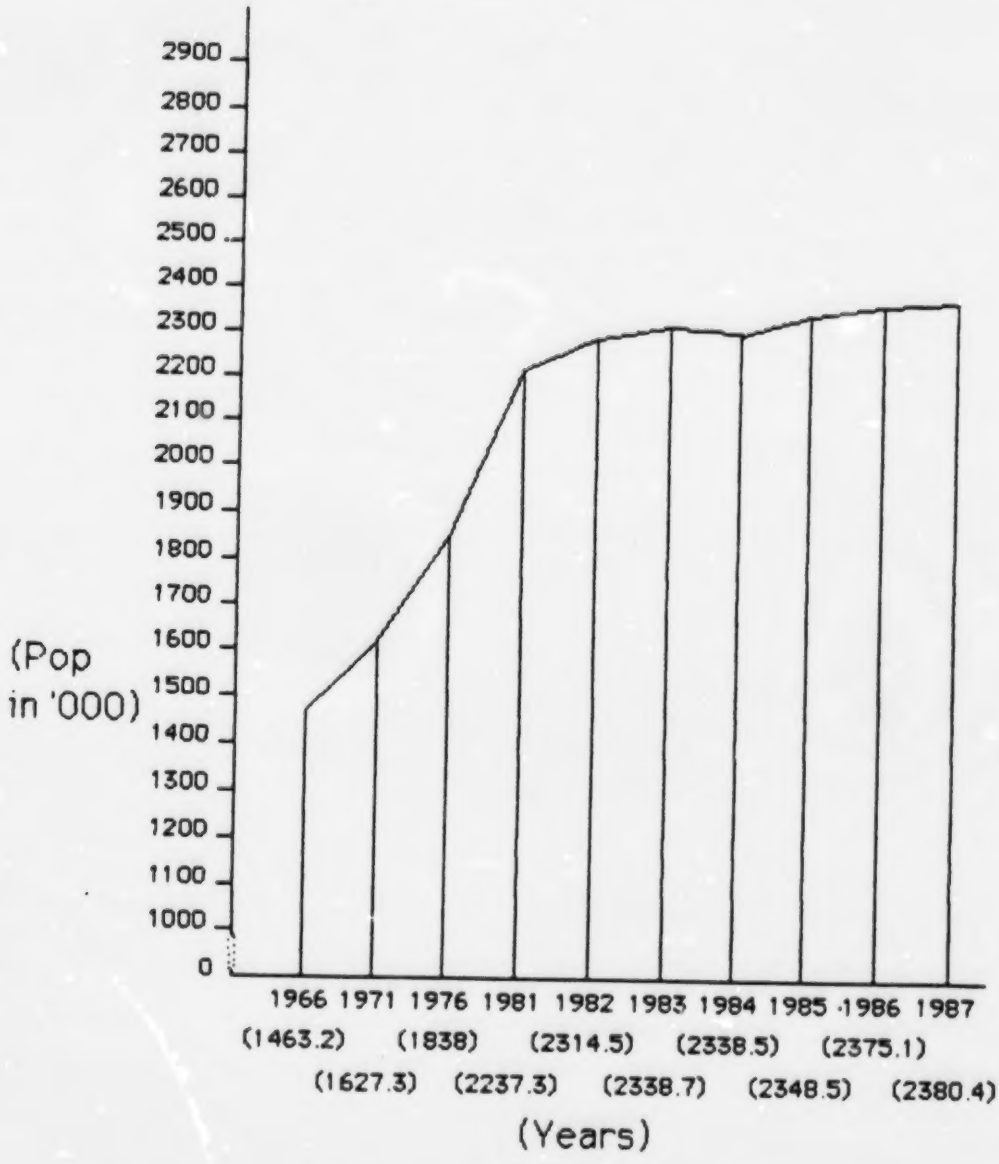


Increase of 3.8% From 1966 - 1987.

Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Location

Historical Population Pattern For Alberta

Figure 27



Increase of 62.7% from 1966 - 1987.

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

G. School Population Patterns

The young are truly the future. By examining the numbers of students over time, we are able to see what the future holds for the Little Bow Constituency. Not only do they represent the future labour force, but they are also the parents of tomorrow.

The analysis of these figures is presented in two ways. The first is the total population pattern. The second is the population pattern of the elementary, junior high, and high schools. For our purposes, elementary school is grades one through six, junior high is grades seven through nine, and high school is grades ten through twelve. This data appears in Figures 28, 29 and 30.

The data used in the Historical School Population Pattern graph, Figure 28, was obtained directly from the school divisions within the Little Bow Constituency. The overall school population figures are inclusive from grade one to grade twelve.

General Observations (School)

As indicated by Figure 28, the school population in Little Bow is declining. Since 1975, the total school population, excluding colony schools, has declined by 919 students. This is a 34.6% decrease. During this thirteen year period, only once was an increase in student population experienced, and that was by only thirty nine students.

In Figures 29 and 30, the Historical School Population Breakdown is visually and numerically illustrated. The elementary grades, grades one through six, have shown a decline of 389 students between 1975 and 1988. This is the equivalent of a 31.2% decrease. Between 1987 and 1988, a slight resurgence took place. The elementary population increased by twelve students or 1.4%.

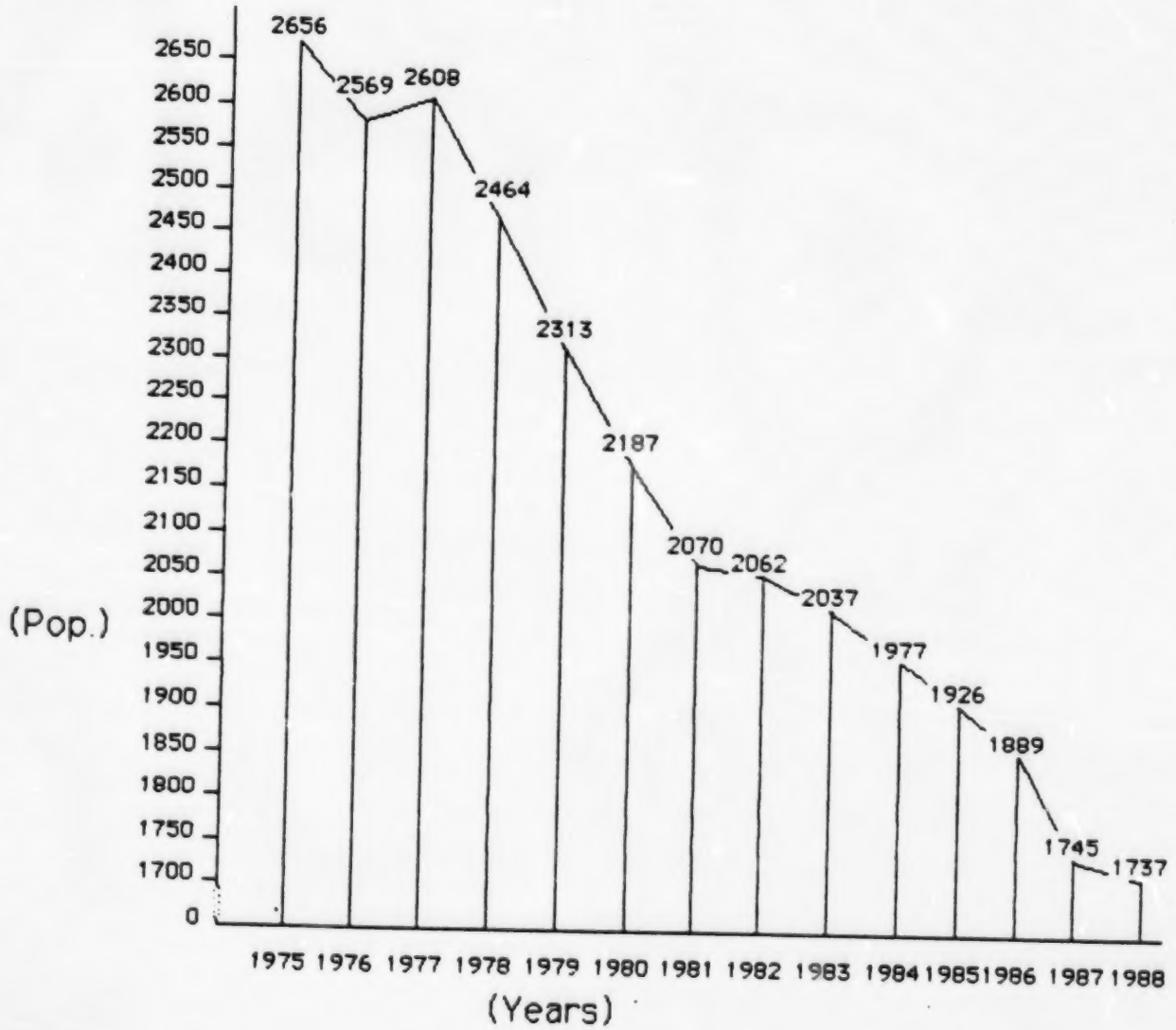
The junior high grades, seven through nine, have shown a decline of 134 students between 1975 and 1988. This is the equivalent of a 30.7% decrease. Between 1987 and 1988, a continuation of declining student numbers was seen. The junior high population declined by six students or 1.9%.

The high school grades, grades ten through twelve, have shown a decline of 392 students between 1975 and 1988. This is the equivalent of a 40.5% decrease. Between 1987 and 1988, the declining trend was still present. The high school population declined by fourteen students or 2.4%.

Although the elementary grades experienced a slight increase, it was not enough to turn the overall trend. The steadily declining junior high category is most serious, because students eventually go on to fill the spots in the high schools. Therefore, we should expect an even stronger decline in high school attendance in the future. With the high school population showing the greatest decline at the present time, we predict greater depopulation in the working age population. We see fewer future farmers, fewer rural families, and fewer young children to keep this part of the rural south young and vibrant.

Historical School Population Pattern

Figure 28

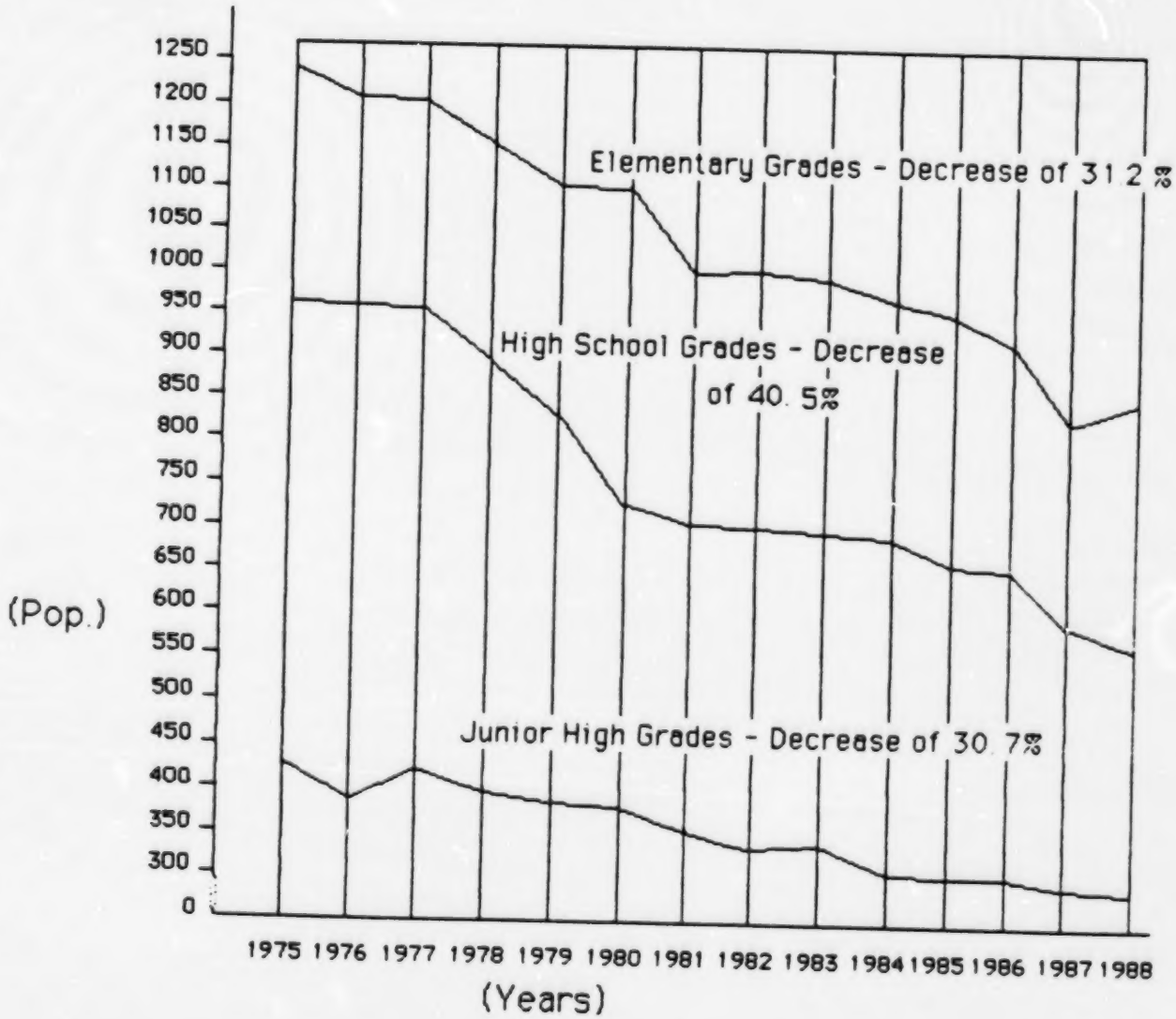


Decrease Of 34.60% From 1975 - 1988.

Source: School Division Offices

Figure 29

Historical School Population Breakdown



Source: School Division Offices

Figure 30

HISTORICAL SCHOOL POPULATION PATTERN BREAKDOWN STATISTICS

YEAR	ELEMENTARY	JUNIOR HIGH	HIGH SCHOOL
1975	1246	437	969
1976	1220	384	965
1977	1213	433	962
1978	1169	398	897
1979	1103	383	827
1980	1082	378	727
1981	1000	359	711
1982	1009	348	705
1983	992	353	692
1984	968	329	680
1985	954	321	651
1986	926	321	642
1987	845	309	591
1988	857	303	577

H. Small Business Activity

We included the small business activity data to help us illustrate two points. First, the health of individual businesses, which are dependent on general economic health. Second, how extensive is small business activity in the Little Bow area?

To obtain these measures we contacted the community offices in the Little Bow constituency for businesses opened and businesses closed between 1982 and 1987. This information was retrieved from records of business licenses and in some cases, memory. From these statistics, we observed whether or not small business openings were successful in this area.

In the seven communities from which we obtained information, fifty three businesses opened, forty businesses closed, one business went into receivership, one business reopened, and one elevator closed, between 1982 and 1987. There appears to be a correlation between business openings and closings and the population trend of each community.

Figure 31

No exact figures could be found specifically for the Little Bow Constituency as a whole. However, we do have the figures for business openings and business closures by the community.

Barons — 1982-1988

Businesses Opened:	6
Businesses Closed:	8

Champion — 1982-1988

Businesses Opened:	2
Businesses Closed:	2
Elevator Closures:	1
Businesses Reopened:	1

Gleichen — 1982-1988

Businesses Opened:	1
Businesses Closed:	1

Lomond — 1982-1988

Businesses Closed:	2
Businesses in Receivership:	1

Milo — 1982-1988

Businesses Opened:	1
Businesses Closed:	1

Vauxhall — 1982-1988

Businesses Opened:	12
Businesses Closed:	14

Vulcan — 1984

Businesses Closed in Town:	8

Vulcan — 1985

Businesses Opened in Town:	27

Vulcan — 1986

Businesses Closed in Town:	4

Vulcan — 1987

Business Openings in Town:	4

All of this information came directly from the communities and/or their County Office.

I. Age Structure in Bow Valley, Drumheller and MacLeod

The provincial constituencies of Bow Valley, Drumheller and MacLeod all adjoin Little Bow. We performed our "age structure" analysis on each in order to see whether similar aging and depopulation has taken place in these areas.

**1981 indicates census figures for the revised constituency area for the 1986 provincial election.*

Bow Valley and MacLeod have a small community/rural population similar to Little Bow's. Drumheller has a large rural area as well as the City of Drumheller.

Like Little Bow, MacLeod shows a loss of population in the age categories to thirty five since 1981 (Figures 36 and 37) and a greater overall population loss. Bow Valley (Figures 32 and 33) also lost in the age categories up to twenty five but to a lesser extent. Even Drumheller, which gained significantly in population overall, lost individuals in the fifteen to twenty four age category (Figures 34 and 35). We speculate that the overall gains are owing to the inclusion of the City of Drumheller, which may have balanced off losses in rural areas of the constituency.

BOW VALLEY

Figure 32

Age Group Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	1,270	1,530	1,935	1,975	1,885
5-14	2,890	3,080	3,540	3,590	3,510
15-24	2,280	3,020	4,010	4,100	3,315
25-34	1,530	2,390	3,510	3,570	3,850
35-44	1,345	1,445	2,100	2,075	2,520
45-54	1,370	1,410	1,470	1,510	1,550
55-64	1,055	1,180	1,285	1,255	1,370
65 +	965	1,035	1,300	1,305	1,565
Total	**12,705**	**15,090**	**19,150**	**19,350**	**19,570**

Figure 33

Age Group Percent of Total Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	10.0%	10.1%	10.1%	10.2%	9.6%
5-14	22.8%	20.4%	18.5%	18.6%	18.0%
15-24	17.9%	20.0%	20.9%	21.2%	16.9%
25-34	12.0%	15.8%	18.3%	18.3%	19.7%
35-44	10.6%	9.6%	10.9%	10.6%	12.9%
45-54	10.8%	9.4%	7.8%	7.8%	7.9%
55-64	8.3%	7.8%	6.7%	6.5%	7.0%
65 +	7.6%	6.9%	6.8%	6.7%	8.0%

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

Figure 34

DRUMHELLER

Age Group Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	1,830	1,955	2,250	1,695	1,905
5-14	4,445	4,855	4,765	3,250	3,585
15-24	3,410	4,505	5,045	3,710	3,565
25-34	2,200	3,350	4,520	3,375	3,950
35-44	2,005	2,530	3,130	2,255	3,120
45-54	2,170	2,390	2,540	1,830	2,095
55-64	1,650	2,115	2,245	1,815	1,900
65 +	1,955	2,125	2,315	1,990	2,300
Total	**19,665**	**23,825**	**26,810**	**19,920**	**22,420**

Figure 35

Age Group Percent of Total Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	9.3%	8.2%	8.4%	8.5%	8.5%
5-14	22.6%	20.4%	17.8%	16.3%	16.0%
15-24	17.3%	18.9%	18.8%	18.7%	15.9%
25-34	11.3%	14.0%	16.9%	16.9%	17.6%
35-44	10.2%	10.7%	11.7%	11.3%	13.9%
45-54	11.0%	10.0%	9.5%	9.2%	9.3%
55-64	8.4%	8.9%	8.3%	9.1%	8.5%
65 +	9.9%	8.9%	8.6%	10.0%	9.9%

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

MACLEOD

Figure 36

Age Group Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	1,590	1,505	1,640	1,820	1,590
5-14	3,955	3,390	3,420	3,720	2,955
15-24	3,010	3,105	3,590	3,770	2,765
25-34	1,820	2,225	2,720	2,965	2,755
35-44	1,785	1,665	2,005	2,175	2,195
45-54	1,805	1,635	1,780	1,865	1,590
55-64	1,715	1,505	1,575	1,735	1,555
65 +	1,890	1,880	2,085	2,420	2,225
Total	**17,570**	**16,910**	**18,815**	**20,370**	**17,620**

Figure 37

Age Group Percent of Total Population

AGE	1971	1976	1981	*1981	1986
0-4	9.0%	8.9%	8.6%	8.4%	9.0%
5-14	22.5%	20.0%	18.2%	18.3%	16.7%
15-24	17.1%	18.4%	19.1%	18.5%	15.7%
25-34	10.4%	13.2%	14.5%	14.7%	15.6%
35-44	10.2%	9.8%	10.6%	10.6%	12.5%
45-54	10.3%	9.7%	9.5%	9.2%	9.0%
55-64	9.7%	8.9%	8.4%	8.5%	8.8%
65 +	10.8%	11.1%	11.1%	11.8%	12.7%

Source: Alberta Statistics Census

III. SOME CONCLUSIONS: RURAL DEPOPULATION AND POLICY CHOICES FOR GOVERNMENT

A. Alberta's Rural Population in History

Alberta, like most areas in the western world, has seen her population shift from the country to the cities. This change has its roots in long term conditions, such as the decreased requirement for human labour on farms for efficient food production.

However, despite the apparent power and persistence of the trend to urbanization, it seemed at one point in the last ten years that this trend had stopped or even reversed. Evidence for this proposition appears in a thesis prepared by Robert Hornbrook, for the University of Alberta, entitled "Rural - Urban Population Change in Alberta: 1956 - 1979". (1) The thesis was released in the spring of 1981.

Hornbrook concludes at page 147 of his thesis:

> "Finally, the general findings of this research indicate that the long standing rural to urban migration trend has been halted, and, on balance, even reversed. During the 1976 to 1979 period, non-metropolitan areas of Alberta gained 11.39% in population compared to 10.36% for metropolitan areas. The turning point in rural and urban growth patterns occurred in 1971 . . . This general trend is evident even if the traditional census definition of rural and urban is used."

B. *The Rural Population of Little Bow*

The population of the riding during the years canvassed by Hornbrook shows a similar increase.

Those were good years for rural Alberta in general, and Little Bow in particular. This was a boom time: high demand led to high commodity prices. Existing farmers bought land, and young farmers entered into the ancient undertaking. As a consequence, the population of Little Bow increased as did the population encompassed by the surrounding constituencies of Bow Valley, MacLeod and Drumheller.

C. *Population of Little Bow in the 1980's*

The statistics contained in this study suggest that the older trend is now reasserting itself, at least for Little Bow.

Hornbrook contemplated the renewal of the old trend in his thesis:

> *"It is, however, uncertain how long these new trends will continue. The changes may only be a temporary phenomenon and the proclamation of a rural renaissance may need to be reconsidered . . . Only time will tell how long these new population growth patterns will persist."* (2)

The statistics herein will make it clear that the trend has been reversed for the people of Little Bow. Nor is the situation now one of the gentle decline; rather, the region covered by the riding is undergoing an absolute decrease in important measures, such as overall population, and school enrollment.

D. A Role For Government

In his book "Empire of Dust" (1987, University of Alberta Press), author David C. Jones chronicles the depopulation of rural southeastern Alberta during the 1920's. The combination of successive drought years and consequent crop failures led to circumstances that Mr. Jones describes as follows:

> *"After five consecutive crop reverses, C.W. Peterson, long time prairie resident and editor of The Farm and Ranch Review, wrote in 1921, 'A fight is being waged in some of these dry areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan that the general public knows little about'. With their backs to the wall, the settlers were staving off the leviathan. 'If ever there were cases calling for sympathy and the generous out pouring of the milk of human kindness, these are surely in the very front ranks', he wrote. 'From the bottom of my heart, I wish them God's speed.'*
>
> *What even Peterson did not know and what few others have known since, was that between a fifth and a quarter of all the townships in*

southeastern Alberta — a whopping 138 of them, covering 3.2 million acres — would lose "at least" fifty five percent of their population from roughly the time he wrote until 1926. These and the farm abandonment figures even the Great Depression never equaled. On both sides of the provincial boundary perhaps 120,000 settlers and their families were enveloped."(3)

The situation described in this study is not as severe as the situation described in Mr. Jones's book. Perhaps the only difference is that we are not as far along. If so (and we must assume so) then we have an opportunity to act to prevent a human tragedy on the scale described and experienced during the twenties and thirties.

To that end, we intend that this study heighten public concern for the problem of rural depopulation. We recognize, further, that heightened public awareness must lead to government action in order to address the problem of rural depopulation. In our view, only government can muster the resources needed to solve the problem. Thus, favorable government action is the ultimate goal of this study and the publicity it receives.

Having stated that, we do not suggest that there has been no government response to the problems of rural Alberta, including those in force in Little Bow and the surrounding regions. Rather, we suggest that the government programs in place are not adequate to address the problem of rural depopulation itself.

In fact, the Government of the Province of Alberta, and the Government of Canada, have a wide variety of farm support programs in place; the list of programs designed to help rural Albertans is impressive. These programs address, among other

things, the problems of high farm input costs, such as transportation; high operating costs; taxation differences between farms and other enterprises; water supply problems where relevant; and marketing problems for farm products. Many of these programs deal with individual elements of the greater problem which has led to rural depopulation.

However, none of the programs deal with the problem of rural depopulation as a whole. As a result many rural Albertans have chosen to leave the living environment of Little Bow and surrounding areas. Despite the range of government assistance, rural Albertans affected by this trend have "voted with their feet" in classic fashion. They have passed judgement on the entire range of programs that offer them potential benefit as rural Albertans.

The people of the region have decided that the sum of government programs do not offer sufficient incentive to remain in Little Bow, or other rural regions in Alberta's south. We know this because our figures show that people have left and are leaving. The matter is that simple. In our view, no opinion polls are needed to make the point: many people have decided to leave and the government programs have not convinced them otherwise. So many people have come to this conclusion that the region is losing people at a rate which in our view threatens the further existence of rural society.

Do we suggest yet more government programs? Perhaps not. At this point, more study is needed. For now, we suggest that the existing programs need reorientation towards the greater goal: keeping people on the land.

The Government needs to commit itself now to a unified program of "rural rejuvenation", with a unified policy at the local, provincial and federal levels designed not only to keep people in the affected areas, but to attract more.

FOOTNOTES

[1] *Hornbrook, Robert, Rural-Urban Population Change in Alberta: 1956-1979 (University of Alberta, 1981; thesis. Edmonton, Alberta, p. 147)*

[2] *Hornbrook, Robert, Rural-Urban Population Change in Alberta: 1956-1979 (University of Alberta, 1981; thesis. Edmonton, Alberta)*

[3] *Jones, David C., Empire of Dust (University of Alberta Press, 1987; book. Edmonton, Alberta)*